

The Redundant Circuit

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A Hungry Gods Universe novella

Register: Labour · Era: Between-Time · Classification: Canon

Archive reference HGU-RC (provisional)

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Part One

The Switching Order

Clyde

Clyde Miller reads the switching order aloud. That is how he was taught to read one, and in forty-one years nobody has told him to stop.

Tonight the order is for Harmon Run. It is the substation over the ridge that has fed the east end of the valley since before Clyde's time. Harmon Run is being switched off for good. While it goes dark, a line crew will be out in its yard in the fog. They will be taking it apart by hand, on wires that Clyde will tell them are dead.

"Step one. Harmon Run. Verify Circuit Nine load transferred or curtailed per Accords schedule." He looks up over his glasses. "Is it?"

Kendra Pavlik has the answer before he finishes asking. She has had most of the answers before he finished asking since she came on in October. "Curtailed at twenty-one hundred. Hub's showing zero on Nine."

"Zero on the circuit."

"Zero on the circuit." Then, because she is learning what he listens for: "They filed self-supply with the regional desk at twenty past eight."

He makes a small pencil tick beside step one. The order is on paper because he printed it. He printed it because the order on the screen scrolls. A thing that scrolls can put step six where step five was without asking you. Kendra has watched him print every order since October without saying a word about it. He appreciates that, though he suspects she is saving it for later.

The control centre sits on the hill above the river with its back to the town. The long room is kept dim at night so the wall board

reads. The wall board is the whole valley drawn in lines. Transmission is drawn in heavy strokes, and the substations are boxes. The feeders fan out thin from each box like roots from a pulled plant. Green is where there is voltage. Gray is where there is none. At a quarter to ten on a Thursday in January almost all of it is green. The gray is where it has been for years. There is the generating plant across the river, which stopped running six winters ago. There are the two mine loads, which went dark before that. Out the long window the plant's stack stands in the fog, and its aircraft light still blinks on top, because nobody has paid anyone to climb up and take the light down.

Tonight there will be more gray.

"Step two," Clyde says. "Sand Lick. Verify the Nine tie open and tagged. That's their end." He glances at the board, at the small box on the far side of the ridge where the new feed comes in. "It's open?"

"Open and tagged. Sand Lick picks up the hub at zero three hundred, on the schedule, when the crew releases the line side." Kendra turns her monitor a few degrees towards him. That is her way of showing him something without making him ask. "Once Harmon Run's retired, the hub's service moves to Sand Lick through the tie, and the Nine getaway at Harmon Run comes out for good. That's the milestone."

"I know what the milestone is."

"I know you know." She turns the monitor back. "I'm saying it so I know."

She goes on in the same level voice. "The Accords retire the public yards that were built for towns that are emptying. The east end. The old plant. The mine loads." She tips her head at the heavy line that runs down the valley along the creek. "Every yard they retire frees margin on the creek corridor. That margin's already sold. The campus has it under its Tier One contract. Their next hall comes on line on the first of February. Harmon Run's the first on the

corridor.”

Clyde does not answer her. He sets the point of the pencil beside step two.

He likes her. He has not decided whether that is a problem. She is twenty-six. She came over from the software side, where she wrote part of the thing that now sits in the corner of every screen in this room. It draws the day as a line and tells you what the line should look like. She reads the curtailment engine as he reads the board, fluently and without being impressed by it. She can tell him why it does what it does. That is more than anyone could tell him about the old dispatch software he learned on. That software did what it did because a man in Allentown had written it that way in a hurry. When they put a trainee from the software side in the chair beside him, he had thought he would be teaching her to distrust the machine. It has not gone that way. Mostly he has been teaching her to read a paper order out loud.

In the lower corner of her screen, in a clean sans-serif, is a figure that does not appear on his. CCUM: —. It stands for Clean Curtailment Under Margin, which is the new standard for a shift. It will start counting when the first breaker opens. He declined the widget when it was offered in November. The supervisor who offered it wrote something on a tablet and did not push.

For forty-one years the standard for a shift was a number you did not see, because it was always the same number. Zero. Zero outages that were yours. Zero customers dropped that you could have held. You did not get a widget for zero. You got to go home at seven and sleep through the day behind the blackout curtains his wife had sewn. Nobody called.

“Step three,” he says. “Harmon Run. Notify field crew of pending switching. Crew on site?”

“They called in at the gate at nine-thirty. Kowalczyk’s crew.”

“Little Andy,” Clyde says, before he can stop it.

Kendra looks at him.

"His father ran the Sand Lick line with me when that line was new," he says. "Everybody called the father Andy. So the son got the other name." He taps the order. "Don't call him that on the radio."

"I wasn't going to."

"I know you weren't."

He works down the order. Step four is to notify the regional desk. Kendra has done it. Step five is to confirm the Accords curtailment window for the corridor. The engine confirms it in a green line of text: CORRIDOR 7 CURTAILMENT WINDOW ACTIVE — RESTORATION PATH: SAND LICK TIE, 03:00 — HUB SERVICE SWITCH LOCKED (TIER 1 CONTRACTED LOAD). He reads it twice. He puts his finger on the last clause.

"The service switch at the hub."

"Locked closed. It's on their restoration path. At zero three hundred Sand Lick closes the tie and the hub's service comes back through that switch. If somebody opens it by mistake, the Tier One contract counts that as a curtailment breach against us, and the corridor fails its first retirement." She says this evenly. "The engine won't let anybody open it tonight without a supervisor code."

"Where's the supervisor tonight?"

"Home. On call."

He nods. Across the room a printer starts up for nobody. It prints nothing. It stops.

On the wall board, down the river past the lock and dam, the new campus sits in its box with its own heavy line running into it. The campus came in two years ago on the Ohio side. Its load is drawn on the board as a flat bar. Whenever Clyde looks at the bar, which he does every night, it is the same height. The load inside it does not drop at night or ease with the weather. He has seen that shape before. It was long ago, on another board in another room, when he was younger than Kendra is now. A building he knew nothing about came online in the northwest corner of the system. It drew seventeen per cent over its projection, flat, all night. He held a gas

plant up at intermediate until morning to carry it. He wrote a note in the log for the day man. He drank his coffee, and he watched. He had not known what the building was. He had thought it was a load. By the time he knew what it was, everybody knew. There was nothing to do about it but keep the plant up. After that there was the next plant, and then the one after that.

He does not tell Kendra this. She has read about it. She was born after it.

"The campus is on the transfer plan," Kendra says. She has followed his eyes. "The engine stages its second feed onto the creek corridor before three. Twice. Validation runs, so the Sand Lick pickup doesn't surprise anybody."

"The creek corridor," Clyde says. "Nine's hung under that line for two miles."

"Nine's dead."

"I know it's dead." He knows what a heavily loaded line does to a dead one strung on the same poles. So does she. So does the engine. He lets it go.

"The hub," he says. "Self-supply."

"Diesel. Six units, paralleled." She has it on her screen already. "They filed the capacity. It's enough for the building if they shed a little."

"And if they don't shed a little."

"Then they're somebody else's problem after zero three hundred." She hears herself and makes a face. "That's what their regional man told the desk. I'm quoting."

"I didn't think you said it."

"I wanted to be clear."

The hub's box on the board is gray now. Behind its gray there are six diesel sets running in the cold. There is a man he has never met, making them run. Between that man and Circuit Nine is a service switch that the engine will not let anyone open. The man is on the far side of his own main breaker. That is how it is supposed to work.

A customer's generator is the customer's business right up to his breaker. The utility's business starts on the other side.

He thinks about how many customers' breakers he has trusted in his working life. Then he thinks about how many of them he has seen. The second number is small.

The radio on his desk opens with a hiss and a click, the old sound, unchanged since before Kendra was born.

"Valley Control, Kowalczyk, Harmon Run."

Clyde picks up the handset. He does not need to look at it.

"Kowalczyk, Valley Control. Go ahead."

"Valley Control, Kowalczyk crew on site at Harmon Run, standing by for the retirement. Requesting you advise on switching."

Clyde looks down at the order. He looks at his own pencil ticks marching down the margin, and at step six, waiting. He presses the key.

Andy

The floodlights on the truck make a room out of the yard. Outside the room it is night and fog and the smell of the creek. Inside it is gravel and steel. Frost on everything that does not move.

Andy Kowalczyk stands with the radio at his shoulder and waits for Clyde to come back. Behind him the crew are unloading the trailer. They unload it the same every time. The journeymen argue about where the rigging goes. Kyle Yoder does it while they argue. The yard hums. It has hummed since before any of them were born. A man could stand in it for eight hours and stop hearing the hum by the second. Then some small thing changes in it. A transformer takes on load, or lets it go. He hears it again all at once. A fridge in a quiet kitchen. You only hear it when it quits.

The hum is the substation doing its work. Two lines at sixty-nine kV coming in over the ridge. The transformer bank in its oil. The bus. The breakers in a row like grain bins. The getaways leaving the yard on their own structures, one per circuit. They carry the valley's power out over the fence and down the roads. Tonight the yard starts coming out. You could not take it all in a week. Tonight is the night it stops, and the first piece goes on the truck. The Circuit Nine getaway. The breaker, the switches, the structure's jumpers and bus work. The Accords call it a retirement. The superintendent calls it the milestone. Andy told his father on the phone. His father called it a shame. Then he asked what time Andy would be home.

"Kowalczyk, Valley Control."

Clyde's voice. Andy has known it all his life. When Andy was small Clyde used to come to the house on Sundays. He sat in the kitchen

with Andy's father. They did not talk about work. With those two that meant not talking at all. An hour of coffee at the kitchen table in near silence. Then Clyde would leave, and his father would say that was a good visit. The voice on the radio is the same voice. A little lower. A little slower.

"Valley Control, go."

"Kowalczyk, switching at Harmon Run will begin at approximately twenty-three thirty. I'll open the high side and the Nine breaker from here. When I give you the word, you'll open and tag the Nine disconnects local, test, and ground. You'll hold a clearance on the Nine getaway, breaker to the first structure outside the fence. Read back."

Andy reads it back. He reads it as Clyde reads it. His father read it that way. Somebody read it that way to his father forty years ago. He does not skip a word. Across the yard the journeymen have stopped arguing. They are listening to the readback. You listen to the readback even when it is not yours.

"Kowalczyk, readback correct. Stand by for switching. Valley Control out."

"Harmon Run, standing by. Kowalczyk out."

He clips the radio back on his shoulder and turns around. Kyle is already standing there. Hot stick in both hands. The voltage tester on its end. He holds it up like a boy holding a flag.

"You're not testing anything for an hour," Andy says.

"I know."

"Put it on the truck."

"I just want to check the battery."

"Check it on the truck."

Kyle checks it on the truck. He checks it with the care of a man defusing something. He holds the tester's light up to his face. He clicks it through its self-test and grins at the little beep. Twenty-two. Second-year apprentice. He came up out of the vocational programme in Wheeling. He had the best numbers

anybody had seen in a while. He had the worst habit anybody had seen in a while. He talks. He talks while he climbs. He talks while he rigs. He talks on the radio. Andy has told him the radio is for the work. Kyle has said yes, sir. Andy has told him not to call him sir. They have had that exchange enough times that the journeymen have started saying it along with them.

"Harmon Run's coming out tonight," Kyle says now, to nobody. "Sixty years."

"Fifty-nine," Earl Haught says. Earl is the older of the two journeymen. Twenty-nine years on the line. He has corrected every apprentice who ever stood in a yard with him.

"It was built sixty years ago."

"Energised the year after. Look at the plate."

Kyle goes and looks at the plate on the transformer bank with his flashlight. He comes back. He says nothing. Earl laughs.

At the tailgate there is coffee in a steel thermos. There is a box of doughnuts. The doughnuts are always there. The superintendent's wife sends them, and it would be a kind of insult not to eat them. The crew eats. Eleven degrees and still dropping. Kyle takes off a glove to use his phone. He holds it out to show the others a picture they have all seen. His daughter asleep in a car seat with her fists up by her ears. She is five months old. Her name is Harper. Kyle says her name every time he shows the picture, as if they might have forgotten. They have not.

"She's got your ears," Earl says.

"She does not."

"Poor thing."

Kyle puts the phone away and pulls the glove back on.

The superintendent called Andy twice today. Once at the shop at noon. Once at home at five, while Andy was eating. Both times he said the same thing. The second time the words came out a little different, because he was at his own supper and had had a beer. The removal work on the Nine getaway has to be finished by zero four

hundred. Not started. Finished. The equipment on the truck. The structure stripped to the steel. The tie at Sand Lick closed at three, the hub transferred, the getaway gone. The line side has to be cut clear at the fence structure before Sand Lick can close the tie at three. The tie waits on Andy's word. If it is not finished by four, the switching window closes. The next window under the Accords schedule is thirty-one days out. The corridor misses its first milestone. The second time, with the beer in him, the superintendent said the rest. The campus down the river gets Harmon Run's margin on the first of February. A thirty-one-day slip puts it past the date. That is what the milestone is. It has a man's name on it, in an office in the city, and the man has made it clear that he knows Andy's name too.

"That's five and a half hours," the younger journeyman says, when Andy tells them. "For a getaway."

"Four and a half. We don't start till the clearance."

"That's tight."

"That's why it's us."

It is the kind of thing his father said. He hears it come out of his own mouth. He feels his father in it and does not mind. The journeymen nod. It is true, and it is the kind of thing a foreman says. Kyle nods hardest. Kyle would climb the structure now if Andy let him. Hot, in the fog, with the hum in his teeth.

Earl does not nod. Earl has nineteen days left before his pension. He has told nobody the number. Everybody knows it. His wife has told everybody's wife. There is a brochure for a camper trailer on the dashboard of his truck, and he has not bothered to hide it. On this crew nobody says the word last around Earl. He won't have it. He says it is bad luck to count what you haven't got yet. He has been saying it for twenty-nine years. Nobody has ever proved him wrong.

Andy walks the yard once while they finish their coffee. He does it every time. He walks the fence line. He looks at the getaways where they leave the yard, one per circuit. Their conductors go up

off the structures into the dark and away over the fence. Circuit Nine goes out the east side and down along the creek road towards the flat land where the hub is. He cannot see the hub from here. On a clear night you can see its lights from the ridge. A long white smear across the bottomland, like a town that was never there before. Tonight there is only fog. The floodlights. The frost.

He stands under the Nine structure and looks up at it. Steel lattice, gray with age. Forty feet to the top. The conductors come off the breaker below. They go up through the bus work and out along the crossarms to the first span. He knows every piece of it from the drawings. Tonight he will know every piece of it with his hands.

The hum is loud here. It goes into your boots.

He walks back to the truck. Kyle has laid the grounding sets out on the tarp in order. Clamps. Cable. Ferrules. As Andy taught him. He is standing over them with his hands in his pockets. Waiting to be told they are right.

"They're right," Andy says.

"I know."

"Then why are you standing over them."

Kyle doesn't have an answer. Andy looks at his watch. Ten fifty-one. Up the ridge behind them there is a dim room with a long window over the river. Clyde Miller will be in it, working down a paper order with a pencil. The hum goes on in the yard, steady, as it has every night of Andy's life.

Wade

The hub is a single roof over thirty-one acres. At ten at night, under the roof, it is louder than it is at noon.

Wade Tomlin walks it on the mezzanine. Radio in one hand, tablet in the other. Below him the building moves. Conveyors in long gray rivers. Totes riding them, yellow, thousands. Pickers on their rails going back and forth along the racking with a sound like a sewing machine. At the south end the sortation line throws parcels down chutes into the lanes, and the lanes fill. At the loading end the dock doors stand open to the cold, the trailers backing in one after another like cattle at a gate. None of it has stopped since the building opened. It does not stop for Christmas. It did not stop the night the roof leaked over aisle forty and it rained inside for an hour. It is not going to stop tonight.

A quarter to nine, his generator lead brought the bank up. All six sets. Eight minutes to nine, Wade walked into the switchgear room himself, opened the main breaker on the utility side, and watched the bank take the building. The lights did not blink. That was the point. The building did not know. Down on the floor, three hundred people on the night shift did not know. The utility's notice had said curtailment effective twenty-one hundred for Circuit Nine, restoration via Sand Lick at zero three hundred, customer advised to curtail operations or arrange self-supply in accordance with Tier One provisions. Wade had arranged self-supply. It was a sentence. He had turned it into six diesel engines the size of shipping containers, standing in a row on a concrete pad behind the building. Running at seventy-one per cent. Making the building believe

nothing had happened.

His phone goes at eleven minutes past ten. He knows who it is before he looks. Nobody else calls him at night.

“Wade. How’s my building.”

“On the bank. Holding.”

“Good man.” The regional operations lead. Columbus. His kitchen table, by the sound of it, a dishwasher running somewhere behind him. Three hubs on curtailment tonight. On the phone since six. “Listen. I’ve been on with the network all evening. They need everything we’ve got out the door tonight. Throughput holds. Full rate. No shedding lanes, no pausing inbound. Understood?”

“The bank’s rated for the building if we shed the charging line and the south dock heaters. I told you that on Tuesday.”

“And I told you on Tuesday that the charging line doesn’t shed. The fleet needs to be full at six.”

“Then the bank runs hot.”

“Then it runs hot for six hours. That’s what it’s for.” A breath on the line. A tired man’s breath. “Wade. I’ve got a man above me with a number, and he’s got one above him. The utility’s doing their thing tonight. Their Accords thing. We’re Tier One on the same corridor, so tonight they move us over to Sand Lick. They want us to sit dark till three so they can take a substation apart. That’s their problem. Our problem is the network. After three o’clock, they give us our power back, and none of it matters. Six hours. You can do six hours.”

“The bank—”

“Is yours. That’s why you’re the one on nights.” A pause. The voice comes back warmer. “I’m not worried. I’ve seen you run that thing.”

He hangs up. Wade stands on the mezzanine with the phone still in his hand. A river of yellow totes goes under him, heading for the sorter. Six hours. Full rate. He can do six hours.

It is a true thing, that he has run the bank before. Three weeks of it. Half the building at a time, an hour at a time, during the

brownouts before Christmas, when the utility was doing its load-shaping under the Accords and the voltage on Circuit Nine sagged in the late afternoons like an old man's shoulders. The first time, the bank came up, paralleled to the utility, carried half the building for an hour. It went well. The second time, the voltage on the utility side dipped while the bank was paralleled. The protection saw it. The relays did what they were built to do. They opened the main breaker to keep the bank from feeding back into a sagging line, and in doing it they dropped half the building for eleven seconds. The sorter jammed. Forty minutes to clear. The third time it happened again. A Friday. Peak. The sorter jammed, the inbound backed up to the highway, and the next morning a regional lead Wade had never spoken to before called him on his cell phone at home. He asked Wade if he understood what the building cost per minute.

He had understood. He had not been told the number, but he had understood.

On the Monday after, he stayed late. He opened the relay cabinet in the switchgear room with his own key. He had the drawings. He had the vendor's manual. Twenty years ago, in school in Cincinnati, he had read about reverse-power relays and synchronism checks, then forgotten most of it; that weekend he read about them again, sitting up in bed with the manual while his wife slept. By Sunday night he could have drawn them from memory. He knew what they were for. The sync check would not let the main breaker close unless the bank and the utility were matched. Voltage, frequency, phase. The reverse-power relay would open the main breaker if power started flowing out of the building instead of in. Between them they kept a customer's generator from pushing power back onto the utility's line. That was all they did. It was a good thing to do. But the vendor had set them tight. When the utility's voltage sagged, the reverse-power relay could not tell a sag from a problem. It opened. The building dropped.

He took a short length of wire from the spares drawer. Twelve gauge, gray insulation. He stripped both ends. He looked at the two terminals for a long time. They were the test-block input, the pair the test contractor had used in August to hold both relays quiet while he worked. The manual gave them half a page. Then he jumpered them. Closed the cabinet. Locked it. The next week the brownouts came again. The bank paralleled and held through every sag. The sorter did not jam. Nobody called him at home.

He had meant to take it out after the brownouts. He had written it on the whiteboard in his office, in the corner, small. *Relay — restore.* It is still there. It has been there so long he no longer sees it.

He does not think of it now as he walks the mezzanine. He thinks of the charging line. The long row of chargers at the north wall, where the fleet of vans comes back at night to plug in. Forty-two of them, each drawing more than a house. He thinks of the dock heaters. He thinks of the bank at seventy-one per cent. What it will be at when the fleet comes in and forty-two vans want to be full by six.

He radios his generator lead. "Where are we?"

"Seventy-three and climbing. Number three's running warm. Nothing I'd call a problem."

"Call it anyway if it gets there."

"Copy."

He goes down the stairs and out the side door onto the pad. The cold hits him. The noise hits him harder. Six engines in a row under their housings, a roar you feel in your teeth, your sternum, the backs of your knees. Exhaust going up white into the fog, lit orange by the pad lights. His lead is standing by number three, ear defenders on, a laser thermometer pointed at its housing. He lifts one hand without turning around.

Seventy-three. Climbing. Wade stands behind him for a minute. Looks at the row of engines. Past the end of the pad, the fence. Past the fence, the service yard. In the service yard, the utility's pole, and

on the pole the switch that connects this building to Circuit Nine. The utility owns it. The utility's crews put it there when the hub was built. It is closed. Beside it, the utility's meter. Beyond it the line goes off along the creek road into the fog, up towards the substation at Harmon Run, which he has never seen.

Between the bank and that pole, his switchgear room. Between his switchgear room and that line, his main breaker. Between his main breaker and a dead line, three weeks ago, two relays. Now a twelve-inch length of gray wire.

He does not think of that either. He goes back inside, where it is warm and loud and yellow. Back up to the mezzanine. He stands with one hand resting on the rail, watching the building run.

Clyde

“Step six,” Clyde says. “Harmon Run. Open high-side breakers, line one and line two. Remote.”

He does it himself, though Kendra could do it. She has done it on the simulator more times than he has done it in life, and she has never made a mistake on the simulator. She will do it for real before the winter is out. But tonight is the first one, and the order has his name at the top. He wants his own hand on it.

He picks up the handset first. “Kowalczyk, Valley Control.”

“Valley Control, Kowalczyk.”

“Kowalczyk, opening the high side at Harmon Run now, line one and line two. Stand clear of the bank.”

Andy reads it back. His voice is an outdoor voice, with a little breath in it, the sound of a man standing in the cold. Clyde says readback correct.

Then there is a thing he has not heard before in his life.

Andy has not let go of the key. Somewhere in the yard he is standing with his thumb on it, or it has caught on a strap. The radio in the control room is open to Harmon Run. Through it comes the sound of the yard. There are a man's boots on gravel, and somebody far off saying something about a pin, and wind. Under all of it, steady, there is the hum.

The screen asks him if he is sure. He is sure. He clicks.

On the wall board the two heavy lines into Harmon Run go from green to gray, first one, then the other, a second apart. Nothing else changes. The valley does not notice. The load on Harmon Run was moved off it two months ago feeder by feeder, the last of it the hub

tonight. All that was left in the yard was the transformer bank, humming to itself with nothing to do.

In the open radio, the hum stops.

Clyde has never heard a substation go quiet. He has opened hundreds of breakers. He has watched hundreds of lines go gray on hundreds of boards. He has never once been standing in the yard, and nobody has ever held a key open for him. The hum is there, and then it is gone, cut out from under the bank's cooling fans. Left alone, the fans run down through themselves a long way, like a big wheel running down. Then they are very low. Then they are a sound he cannot be sure he is hearing. Then there is only the wind in the open radio, and a man's boots, and somebody saying *there she goes*.

He listens after that. He listens to the wind.

The key releases. The radio clicks shut.

"Line one open. Line two open," Kendra says, reading the telemetry back. She is looking at him.

"He left his key open," Clyde says.

"I heard." She waits. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"Step seven. Harmon Run. Open Circuit Nine breaker. Remote."

He clicks. The Nine breaker opens. On the board the thin line of Circuit Nine goes gray. It is the line that runs east out of Harmon Run along the creek road to the hub. It goes gray all the way to the end.

"Nine open," Kendra says.

He keys the radio. "Kowalczyk, Valley Control. High side is open, line one and line two. Circuit Nine breaker is open. You may proceed to open and tag the Nine disconnects local. Advise when complete."

When Andy has read it back, Clyde says readback correct and ticks step seven with the pencil.

Four minutes later Andy calls back. The Nine disconnects are open and tagged. Clyde reads out the tag numbers from the order.

Andy reads them back from the tags hanging on the switch handles in the yard. They match, and Clyde ticks it. Then comes the test. He has heard a thousand crews do it, and he listens to it every time as if it were the first. Andy calls it on the radio as it happens, which is how Clyde likes it called.

“Testing the Nine getaway, line side. Tester checked on the proving unit. Phase A, dead. Phase B, dead. Phase C, dead. Tester rechecked on the proving unit. Good.”

“Copy dead on all three.”

“Applying grounds. Breaker side, then line side at the structure.”

While the grounds go on, the radio is closed for some minutes, and Clyde listens to the silence. He pictures the work in its order. First the hot stick goes up with the clamp on its end. Then the clamp bites the conductor. Then the cable comes down to the ground rod. Then comes the next phase, and the one after it. Then the second set goes on, on the far side of the work. The grounds make a zone. Inside the zone, if anything ever came up the line, it would go to ground through the cable before it went through a man. Clyde has known grounds save lives twice. He has known their absence take one.

“Grounds applied, breaker side and line side,” Andy says. “Kowalczyk requesting clearance on the Circuit Nine getaway, breaker to first structure outside the fence.”

A clearance is the operator’s word, given by name to one man. It says that everything inside its limits is dead, and that it will stay dead until that man hands it back. Everything the crew touches tonight with their hands, they touch on Clyde’s word.

Clyde reads the clearance off the order, slowly. He names the equipment, the limits, the tags and the man. He says *Kowalczyk, you now hold the clearance*. Andy reads it back and says he holds it.

“Clearance issued at twenty-three fifty-two,” Clyde says. He writes the time down, then signs his name in the box beside it, *C. Miller*, as he has signed it since he was twenty-two.

In the corner of Kendra's screen, the figure that has been a dash all evening becomes a number. It is green. Clyde can see it without looking at it, at the edge of his eye, like headlights coming up behind you before you turn your head. CCUM: 100.0%. Beneath it a smaller line has begun to run, a clock counting up from zero. It counts minutes in window. It counts minutes clean.

"We're under margin," Kendra says, not to him particularly. "First retirement on the corridor. It's accruing."

He knows what she means. The Accords have their own arithmetic. Every clean minute in the window goes on the corridor's record. The corridor's record goes to the regional desk. The regional desk sends it on to the people who decide how many operators a valley needs once it has fewer substations to run. The schedule has Valley Control down to one chair a night by the autumn. Clyde has read the schedule. Since November he has understood that the green number in the corner of Kendra's screen is how she will keep that chair. It is also how he will lose it. He does not begrudge her. He is sixty-three, he has done his time, and he is tired in his knees.

Kendra looks at the number a second longer than she needs to. She told him once why she left the software side. It was in November, on the only night she talked about anything but the work. The software side was letting people go a floor at a time. She had wanted a job that could not be done from anywhere else. She had wanted to be needed in a room. Then the Accords came to the room. She does not say any of this now. She watches the clock under the number count its first clean minute.

He looks at the board instead. Harmon Run is gray. The high-side lines are gray. Circuit Nine is gray from the yard all the way east along the creek road to the gray box of the hub. Behind that gray, six diesel engines are running in the cold, carrying thirty-one acres of building that does not know anything has happened.

He looks at the gray line until Kendra asks him if he wants coffee. He says yes.

Andy

The first thing you do on a getaway is make it safe to take apart. The second thing is take it apart. The second thing takes all night.

They have been at it for twenty minutes. It is going well. Earl is up the structure in his harness at the top crossarm with the jumpers. He cuts the bus work loose one phase at a time. The younger one is on the ground at the tag line. Kyle is halfway up on the lower arm, belted in, rigging a sling on the first section that will come down. Andy is on the ground where he can see all of them. That is where a foreman stands. His father said it every time Andy wanted to climb. That was the one summer the union allowed Andy on his father's crew, when he was young. *You don't climb. You watch the men who climb. If you want to climb you can stop being foreman.*

Andy finds he is watching Earl more than the others. Earl is slower than he was a year ago. Not by much. His hands take a second longer to find a bolt in the cold. He rests back on his lanyard between cuts, which he never used to do. When he looks down into the floodlights he squints. Andy keeps his light on him.

The floodlights put hard white on the steel and hard black behind it. Frost on the crossarms. Frost on the grounds where they hang from the conductors in their clamps. The heavy jacketed cable runs down to the rods. Everything in the yard is quiet. After the hum the quiet is huge. The fog carries sound strangely. From somewhere down the creek road comes a long flat roar. Andy cannot place it at first. He turns his head to it, his neck cold above the collar. Then he can. Diesel. A lot of it. The hub, on its own power, two miles off.

"Sling's set," Kyle calls.

"Check it."

"I checked it."

"Check it."

Kyle checks it. He reaches around the steel, feels the shackle pin, tugs the sling. He calls down that it's set. Andy puts the light on it. It's set.

"Take it."

Earl cuts the last bolt. The section swings into the sling. They lower it hand over hand on the tag line, the younger journeyman steadying it, down through the lit air to the gravel. It touches. They unhook it. It lies there in the frost, dull gray steel on white stones.

"One," Kyle says.

"Don't count," Earl calls down. "It jinxes it."

"It doesn't jinx it."

"It jinxes it every time."

By half past twelve they have five pieces down. Andy stands with his hands in his jacket pockets and does the arithmetic. He does not like it. The work is not slow. The crew is good. But the getaway is older than the drawings say. Some of the bolts have been in the steel since the yard was built. Those have to be cut rather than turned. Cutting is slower than turning. And the grounds are in the way of the second bay.

The second bay is where the conductors come off the structure and out along the first span towards the fence. To get the bus work down from that side, somebody has to reach across the top of the line-side grounds. They set them where the drawings said to set them. Kyle found the drawings were wrong. Twenty minutes in, hanging off the lower arm with a tape measure nobody had asked him to bring. Three feet out on the second bay. He called it down. Earl said he had been setting grounds since before Kyle could walk. Earl went up and measured it himself. He came down and said nothing. On this crew that is how you tell a boy he is right.

So the line-side grounds have to move. Out along the span, past the work, to the next point on the conductors. The right way is to put a set on at the new point before the old one comes off. That way the wire is never bare. There are two sets in this yard. Both are on. The breaker-side set holds the bus. The line-side set holds the line. The third set is on the other truck at the shop. The right way means taking the breaker-side set off the bus, carrying it out along the span, bringing it back after. Twenty minutes. They do not have twenty minutes. So the set will come off and go back on farther out. For the minute and a half that takes, the men between the grounds have nothing between them and the line except the word that the line is dead. There is a procedure for that minute and a half. You test the conductor again before the clamp goes back on. You follow the procedure.

Kyle comes down the ladder at ten to one for coffee, his face red from the cold, his breath going up white. Earl comes down behind him, slower. They stand at the tailgate with the steel thermos cups between their gloves, stamping their boots on the gravel. Steam comes off the cups into the floodlights.

"Harmon Run," Kyle says. "My grandad used to drive me past this when I was a kid. On the way to my aunt's. He said it was where the electricity came from."

"It goes through here," Earl says. "It comes from the plants."

"I was six."

"You should've known."

Kyle drinks his coffee and looks at the structure, at the five gaps in it where the sections were. "Nineteen days," he says to it.

Nobody says anything. The younger journeyman finds something to look at in the gravel.

"What did I tell you," Earl says.

"I'm not counting. I'm saying a number."

"That's counting."

"Your wife told my girlfriend you're taking the camper to Myrtle Beach in March. She says the fishing rods have been standing by your back door since Thanksgiving."

"My wife," Earl says, "talks." He takes off a glove, raps his bare knuckles twice on the steel of the truck bed without looking at it, and puts the glove back on. Andy has seen him do it before every climb for as long as he has known him.

"I'm putting the overtime towards a crib," Kyle says, to change the subject. Even Kyle can tell when he has pushed a thing far enough. "Harper's too long for the bassinet. Her feet touch the end."

"Five months and she's too long for it," the younger journeyman says. "She's going to be taller than you."

"Everybody's taller than him," Earl says. The crew laughs. It is all right again.

Andy looks at his watch. Twelve fifty-four.

The removal has to be done by four. It has to be done by four because the switching window closes at four. Miss the window and the next one is thirty-one days out. Thirty-one days out, the corridor misses its milestone. Miss the milestone and the man in the city with Andy's name in his mouth will say it on a call. Then he will say it in writing. That is one part of the arithmetic. The other part is the cold. It is ten degrees and falling. The men are cold. The cold makes you slow. Slow makes the second bay take longer. The second bay is where the time goes.

"We're going to move the line-side grounds," he says. "Out past the second bay. Then we take the second bay while they're out there, and the top bus, and we're done."

Earl looks at the structure and looks at the grounds. "When?"

"When the top bus on the first bay's down. Around two-thirty."

"That's tight."

"That's why it's us."

It is the second time tonight he has said it. He hears it this time. It sounds less like his father.

Earl nods. He pours out the rest of his coffee on the gravel. It steams, and then it doesn't. "We'll need to be quick on the relocate."

"We'll be quick."

"Retest's on the stick. Stick's on the truck." Earl does not look at Kyle. "Whoever's doing it should have it up there before we start. I'll take the reach. I've done a hundred."

Andy looks at him. At the squint. At the second it takes his hands to find the lid of the thermos. Nineteen days.

"Kyle'll do it," Andy says. "Kyle carries the stick up and takes the reach. You stay on the top bus."

Earl holds his look a moment, then lets it go. "Your crew."

Kyle nods. He is already looking at the structure. He is already up there in his head. Andy can see it. Kyle reaching out across the top of the second bay with the clamp in his hand. Getting it done fast. Getting it done first. Andy knows the look. He had it at twenty-two. His father used to take the stick out of his hands. He would make him say the procedure out loud, standing on the gravel, before he let him go up.

Andy does not make Kyle say the procedure out loud. They are behind. He says, "Back up. Let's get the top bus off," and the men go back up the steel in the white light. The fog closes a little tighter around the yard. Down along the creek road the diesel roars on.

Wade

At a quarter to one the fleet comes in.

Wade watches from the north mezzanine. The vans turn off the county road in a line with their headlights on and come up the drive one after another, forty-two of them, white, into the charging lanes along the north wall. The drivers back them in, plug them in, walk away across the lot towards their own cars with their collars up. One after another the chargers wake, and the load on the bank climbs.

“Eighty,” says the generator lead on the radio. “Eighty-three. Number three’s at the edge.”

“Where’s the edge.”

“Where I don’t like it.”

“Shed the south dock heaters.”

The lead sheds the dock heaters. Three per cent. That is all it buys, and he takes it. Wade does not tell the dock supervisor. She will find out in twenty minutes, when her people start complaining about their hands. She will call him, and he will tell her it is temporary. It will be.

He goes down to the switchgear room, because he wants to see the meters himself and not a laptop’s idea of them. It is the only quiet room in the building, a long cinder-block box, the gear standing in its cabinets along both walls, a hum in the air that belongs to the gear. The bank’s panel shows six sets online, voltage steady, frequency steady. Load eighty-one per cent and wandering. The utility-side panel beside it shows nothing, which is right. Circuit Nine is dead. The main breaker is open. The lamp for utility voltage,

a small amber lens under a hood, is dark.

He stands and watches the meters. He is good at this. He found it out about himself late, at thirty-five, when he left the plant in Ohio after a decade as a shift engineer and came here for twice the money and a title that meant nothing. He can stand in front of a piece of equipment and watch it, the needles and the sound of it and whatever it is doing in the floor under his boots, and know before the numbers say so whether it is going to hold. Nobody taught him. Nobody could have. He knew the old boilers in Ohio like that, and he knows this. The bank will hold. He also knows it is at eighty-one per cent, with number three at the edge and the fleet still plugging in. Between now and three o'clock there is nothing left he can shed without calling the regional lead. He is not going to call the regional lead.

His phone buzzes. The dock supervisor, early. He lets it buzz.

Twenty past one. Number three trips on high temperature.

The bank does what it is built to do. The other five sets pick up its share at once. Ninety-six on each. The governors hunt. The frequency on the building's bus sags, comes back, sags. The lights in the switchgear room do not flicker. Wade feels it anyway, in the gear's hum. A note that wasn't there. He puts his palm flat on the nearest cabinet as if that will tell him more. The radio fills with his lead's voice, *three's down, three's down, I'm on it, give me ten minutes*, and behind the voice the roar of the pad.

"Shed the charging line," Wade says.

"You said the charging line doesn't shed."

"Shed it for ten minutes."

The lead sheds it. Eighty-eight across five sets. Up on the north wall forty-two vans stop charging. Nothing happens. Nobody knows. Wade stands in the switchgear room with his heart going. He watches the meters come back to where he can live with them.

Ten minutes. The clock on the wall. His watch. The meters. The regional lead will see the charging line drop on the dashboard. The

regional lead watches the dashboard from his kitchen table in Columbus. He will call.

He does not call. Ten minutes pass. The lead gets number three restarted. It comes back online warm and takes a share. Wade puts the charging line back. Eighty-seven. Holding. The building runs. The phone does not ring.

One-thirty. An hour and a half to three. Ninety minutes. Number three back, warm, carrying its share. He can do ninety minutes.

One thirty-six. The amber lamp on the utility-side panel comes on.

He sees it light out of the side of his eye and turns. It is lit, a low even amber under its hood. Voltage present on the utility side. The meter beside it is reading something. Not much. It wanders a little.

He has seen a dead line light a lamp before. At the plant in Ohio a dead feeder strung on the same poles as a live one would pick up a ghost of its neighbour's charge. Enough to light a lamp. Enough to move a meter. Not enough to run a light bulb. He knows that. He does not think it now. He does not think anything with a word in it. He thinks, in a warm rush that comes up through his chest before his head can get in front of it, *they're early*. Of course they are early. Sand Lick is early. They have closed the tie ahead of schedule. There is power on Circuit Nine. He can get the building off the bank, off number three, off the edge, onto the line. The charging line can run. The dock heaters can come back on. Nobody has to call anybody.

He picks up the phone. The utility's number for Tier One customers. It rings through to a recording that says his call is important. Important. He hangs up.

He looks at the lamp. Lit. Still lit. A small amber eye under its hood, not blinking, not going anywhere.

The main breaker's control is on the panel in front of him, a black handle with a red flag. Wade has closed it a hundred times. Closed it onto a live, healthy utility line, with the relays in the cabinet behind him checking the match every time and letting it close. It closed.

The relays are not checking anything now. He knows that. He jumped them. He knows that too, somewhere at the back of his head. But the lamp is lit. The lamp is the utility telling him there is a line.

He puts his hand on the handle and turns it.

The main breaker closes with a sound like a car door.

For a moment nothing happens. Then everything does. The gear's hum goes from a note to a growl all at once. The meters on the bank's panel swing hard right together. Ninety. A hundred. Past. The needles pinned. Out on the pad the six engines, five and the warm one, change their voices together. A sound he has never heard them make. A truck downshifting on a hill with too much on it. The frequency meter drops. The lights in the switchgear room dim to brown.

Beside the amber lamp, the utility meter's needle has gone the wrong way. Hard against the left-hand stop, where Wade has not once seen it in six years in this room. That side of the dial means power going the other way. The building pushing out onto the line. Out through the pole in the service yard. Onto Circuit Nine. Up the creek road in the fog towards a substation he has never seen. He sees it. Later he will be able to say exactly where the needle was.

Two seconds. Perhaps.

Then the bank's own protection sees what the bank is carrying, does not like it, trips. The main breaker opens with a bang he feels in his feet. The engines unload all at once, scream up to speed, are caught by their governors. The building goes dark.

All of it. Thirty-one acres. The conveyors stop. The pickers stop on their rails. The sorter stops with parcels in its chutes. The emergency lights come up, a strip of white along the ceiling every forty feet. In the new quiet of a building that has never been quiet, Wade can hear three hundred people start to talk at once, far off, through the cinder-block wall.

His radio is full of his lead's voice. His phone is buzzing in his hand.

He does the thing he knows how to do. No thinking. Doing. He resets the bank. He brings the sets back to the bus one after another, waits on each, watches the frequency. He opens the utility side. Confirms the main breaker open. Confirms the lamp. The lamp is dark again. He closes the bank onto the building, and the building comes back. Lights. Conveyors. The long rising whine of the sorter spinning up. On the other side of the wall the talking rises to a cheer and falls away.

Five minutes and ten seconds. He knows because he looks at his watch before and after, as they taught him in Ohio.

His phone is still buzzing. The regional lead.

"What was that."

"Generator fault," Wade says. "We tripped. We're back."

"Five minutes, Wade."

"Five minutes."

"Is it going to happen again?"

"No," Wade says, and means it.

The regional lead hangs up. Wade stands in the switchgear room and looks at the utility-side panel. The lamp, dark. The meter, zero. Circuit Nine is dead, as the notice said it would be until three o'clock. Whatever he saw, it is not there now.

The needle against the stop. He thinks about it. He stands in front of the dial and makes himself think about it, once, properly. A meter does strange things in a trip. He has seen meters do strange things.

Generator fault. The bank tripped. The bank did trip; he watched it. He takes out the tablet and opens the shift log. His thumbs are shaking, a little. He waits until they stop. Then he types, in the box for events:

01:38 – Generator fault, main breaker trip, full building loss. Reset.
Restored 01:43. No damage.

He reads it through twice. He saves it. Tablet under his arm, he goes out of the quiet room into the loud one, where the building is running. Behind him, on the far wall of the switchgear room, the lamp stays dark under its hood.

Part Two

The Dead Line

Andy

The superintendent is eating something. Andy can hear it through the phone. The small sounds of a man chewing in a warm kitchen at half past one in the morning. Andy stands at the tailgate with his back to the structure and his free hand in his armpit. He listens to the window explained to him for the third time today.

Over his shoulder, if he turned, he would see the structure lit white in the floodlights and the two men on it. Earl at the top crossarm with the cutters, working the last bolts on the first bay's bus. Kyle on the lower arm, rigging the next sling. The younger journeyman below them at the tag line. He does not turn. He has looked at them every thirty seconds for an hour and a half. He knows where they are as he knows where his own hands are.

"Four o'clock," the superintendent says. "I've got him at seven, first thing, and I want to tell him it's done."

"It'll be done."

"You're on the second bay?"

"We're on the first. The second's after we move the grounds."

"Move them, then."

"We're moving them at two-thirty."

"Why not now?"

Because the top bus on the first bay is still up and Earl is still on it, Andy does not say. Because you do not move a ground set with a man's hands in the work beside it. Because a superintendent who has not stood in a yard since before the corridor was built does not need to be told the order things come off a structure in. "Two-thirty," he says.

“Andy.” A swallow. “I’m not riding you. I’ve got a man above me.”

“I know you do.”

“Everybody’s got a man above them.”

Behind Andy, in the yard, something cracks.

It is loud, a rifle shot in a small room, a sound that hits the steel of the truck and the steel of the fence and comes back off both, and the fog lights up blue from behind him all of it at once, and the gravel and his own shadow are thrown forward over the tailgate and the frost on the truck bed goes blue and then white and then gone, and he is already turning, and he does not remember dropping the phone.

The ground cables are moving, the heavy leads of the line-side set jumping against the lattice of the Nine structure where they hang from their clamps down to the rod at the foot of the steel, all three at once, and there is a sound coming off them he has heard once before in his life, at a training yard in Morgantown, a deep angry buzzing that lives in the chest, and it lasts two seconds, maybe less, and then the leads fall still and hang there swinging a little and the buzzing stops, and in the quiet after it the yard is exactly as it was, the floodlights, the fog, the frost, two men on the steel.

His light is on Earl before he has decided to put it there.

Earl is at the top crossarm, a few feet above the line-side clamps. Back against his lanyard. Both hands off the work and held out from his body, open, as a man holds his hands after he has touched a stove. He is not moving. His face in the light is white and squinting.

“Earl.”

Nothing.

“Earl. Talk to me.”

“I’m here.” Earl’s voice comes down out of the light, flat and careful. “I’m here. I didn’t feel it.”

“Kyle.”

“I’m good.” Kyle on the lower arm, both hands on his lanyard. “I’m good, I’m good. What was that? Did you see that?”

“Everybody down,” Andy says. “Nobody touches anything. Come down slow.”

They come down. Earl first, slower than Andy has ever seen him come down a structure. He places each boot and looks at it before he trusts it. Kyle after, fast, talking. At the bottom Earl stands with his gloves off. He looks at his own bare hands in the floodlight, turning them over and back. Then he puts his knuckles to the steel of the structure and raps it twice.

“Nineteen days,” he says, to nobody.

It is the first time any of them has heard him say the number. Kyle opens his mouth. For once in his life he shuts it again.

Andy finds the phone in the gravel under the bumper. The superintendent is still saying his name. “I’ll call you back,” he says, and hangs up on him. He has never done that.

He goes to the foot of the structure. The three leads of the line-side set come down the steel there to the ground rod. He takes off his glove. The cold bites his fingers at once. He lays the back of his hand against the jacketed lead where the copper shows at the ferrule.

It is warm.

Not hot. At nine degrees, after two seconds, it is a small warmth. The warmth of a mug somebody set down ten minutes ago. He holds his hand there until it fades. That does not take long. Copper does not warm itself. Something went through it.

He takes the light up the ladder, halfway, to where he can see the line-side clamps from below. The rungs are cold on his bare hand. On the B phase, where the clamp bites the conductor, the frost is gone. It has melted off in a clean ring the width of his hand on either side of the jaw. The wire inside the ring is dark and wet. Under the lip of the jaw, where the clamp’s bronze meets the aluminium, there is a pit. Small. Bright at the edges. The size of a pencil eraser. Beside

it on the jaw, a scatter of dark spatter, where metal went somewhere in a hurry.

He looks at it for a long time. Then he climbs down.

"Ice," the younger journeyman says. He was at the tag line the whole time. He did not move from it. He is still holding it in both hands, as if somebody might take it off him. "Frost under the jaw. Temperature drop. Something let go."

"That wasn't ice," Earl says.

"It was loud like ice."

"I've heard ice. That wasn't ice."

"It's induction," Kyle says. He is lit up with it, as you are at twenty-two when something happens and nobody got hurt. "It's the corridor. We did it in second year. You've got a dead line hung under a loaded one, you get voltage on it off the field. It's grounded at this end, so it builds at the other. Something changes on the loaded line, it pushes current through your set. They showed us video. Guy's clamp sparked just like that."

"That was a lot of spark," Earl says.

"It's a lot of line."

Andy looks at the three of them. It is nine degrees now. Earl's bare hands are shaking in the light. He has not noticed. The younger journeyman is holding the tag line. Kyle is lit up. Nobody is hurt.

He tries Kyle's version on. It fits, as far as Andy knows the physics. That is about as far as the second-year video goes. He tries the younger journeyman's. It does not fit at all. Ice does not warm copper. And there is a third one nobody has said. His father would have said it first, standing where Andy is standing, with the burn on the wire above him and the leads still faintly warm: *something came up the line*.

Nothing can come up the line. The line is Clyde's word. Andy has held Clyde's word in his hands his whole working life. It has never once been wrong.

Across the yard, on the tailgate, the tester head sits beside the hot stick. Kyle left it there after the test before midnight.

Andy picks up the radio. His bare hand is stiff on it.

“Valley Control, Kowalczyk, Harmon Run.”

“Kowalczyk, Valley Control. Go ahead.” Clyde, at once, as if he had the handset in his hand already.

Andy says it as he was taught to say it. In order. Nothing added.

“Valley Control, at approximately zero one thirty-eight we observed a flash at the line-side ground set on the Nine structure. Ground leads moved. Audible current on the set, approximately two seconds. Ground leads warm to the touch after. B phase clamp arced. Burn on the conductor under the clamp jaw. Crew is uninjured. Crew is down off the structure and clear. Requesting you advise.”

There is a pause on the radio. It is not long. Andy has known Clyde Miller all his life. He has never heard him pause before answering.

“Kowalczyk, copy flash on the line-side set, zero one thirty-eight. Keep your crew clear. Keep your grounds on.” Another pause. “Stand by.”

Clyde

The line came in amber at one thirty-eight and fourteen seconds. It sat in the event list between two green lines the engine had written about itself, and Clyde would have scrolled past it. Kendra did not. She said “huh” in the voice she keeps for things she finds interesting, and she put the line up on the big screen between their desks. She read the classification out loud. There was a small satisfaction in her reading it.

HUB SVC SW 7-114 – 01:38:14 – 612 A – DIR CUST→LINE – 2.1 s

CLASSIFIED: CUSTOMER-SIDE TRANSIENT. COINCIDENT WITH CORRIDOR 7 STAGING, STEP 1 OF 2 (01:36). PROBABLE INDUCED CIRCULATING CURRENT / CT ARTEFACT. WITHIN MARGIN. NO ACTION.

He was reading it for the third time when the radio opened and Andy said *flash*.

Now the crew is on the ground and the radio is closed. The two lines of text sit on the big screen like a sum somebody else has already done. Clyde reads the top line again, one field at a time, as he would read a step. The switch. The time. The amps. The direction. The direction.

“Six hundred amps,” Clyde says.

“For two seconds.” Kendra has the waveform up. It is the raw trace from the switch, a burst of jagged lines in the middle of a flat one, like a seismograph in a bad week. “And look where it sits. The engine started staging the campus feed onto the creek corridor at one thirty-six. At one thirty-eight the corridor’s still settling. Nine’s hung under that line for two miles and it’s grounded at Harmon Run,

so the far end floats. You get voltage at the hub end off the field. It's modelled."

"Induction doesn't push six hundred amps out of a customer."

"It doesn't have to. Those switch sensors are cheap. On a transient on a floating line they ring. You get numbers that never went through the wire." She explains it patiently, as she would explain it to anyone. He can hear her choosing to be patient. "And the direction flag on those units flips. It's a known issue."

"It says out."

"It says out." She pulls up a second window. It is the hub's Tier One registration, a clean form with a green seal in one corner. "Sync-check relay, installed. Reverse-power relay, installed. Both tested in August by a certified contractor, signed. Their main breaker can't close onto a dead line, Clyde. It physically can't. And if their bank ever pushed power out, the reverse-power relay would open them in a quarter of a second. Not two." She puts her finger on the seal as if it might move. "It can't be the hub."

"The hub is the only thing on that line that can make six hundred amps."

"The hub is the only thing on that line with a signed form that says it can't."

He looks at the form. He has seen a thousand like it. He has never seen the thing a form like it describes. That thing is a box in a cinder-block room two miles down the creek road. It sits behind a fence, and behind a man he has never met. The form is what the man said about the box in August.

"Andy saw a burn on the conductor," he says.

"Induced current through a set arcs. Every apprentice sees the video." She stops. She is still looking at the screen when she says the next thing, and her voice has changed. "I know what I sound like."

"You sound like the engine."

"I wrote a piece of the engine." She turns and looks at him. "I'm telling you what it costs, because it won't tell you, and you asked me

in October to say things out loud. If you pull them, the clearance comes back and the window closes at four whatever happens after. Thirty-one days. The corridor fails its first retirement on its first night. The regional desk scores this shift as a scrub." She lets it stand a second. "My name is under yours on the order."

"I know where your name is."

"Then pull them, if you think it's right. I'll put my name under that too." A breath. "But Clyde. Say it's the hub. Say everything I just told you is wrong. The grounds were on. Whatever it was went into the set and down the rod into the dirt, and the men on that structure felt nothing. Andy said it. Nobody's hurt." She says the next part quietly, as if she is sorry it is true. "That's what grounds are for."

He has no answer for that.

Instead he picks up the desk phone to dial the emergency number off the hub's registration. It rings, and it goes on ringing. He counts the rings without meaning to. At the eleventh a woman answers, out of breath, over a roar of machinery and wind.

"South dock."

"This is Valley Control, the utility. I need your facilities lead."

"You and me both." She is shouting over something. "I've been calling him for an hour. My heaters are off, my people can't feel their hands, and he won't pick up."

"Are you on your generators?"

"Since nine."

"Did you lose power about twenty to two?"

"We lost the whole building. Five minutes. The sorter's still jammed on B lane." Behind her a truck horn sounds, long. "Why? Was that you?"

"No," Clyde says, and hears how quickly it comes. "Tell him Valley Control needs him to call. It's urgent."

"If I find him."

She hangs up.

Kendra, who has heard all of it, is already typing.

“They had a generator trip,” she says. “At one thirty-eight. Their bank went down.” She is thinking hard. He can see it in her shoulders. “That fits too. The staging step moves the corridor, the far end of Nine floats up, their bank sees it through the service switch and trips on its own protection. That’s their relays working. That’s exactly what the relays do.” She stops typing. “I’m not making it up, Clyde. It fits.”

It does fit. Everything fits, and all of it fits two ways.

He asks her for the hub’s drawings. She has them up in seconds. It is the single-line for the whole service, a clean diagram, and he reads it from the pole inwards. First comes the utility’s switch on its pole. Then comes the service transformer. Then comes the main breaker, with the bank of six behind it. Between the main breaker and the transformer, in a small neat box with a device number beside it, are the two relays. When he asks for the test report, she finds that too. It is a scanned file from August, four pages long, on a contractor’s letterhead. There are pickup settings in a table. At the bottom a line says *all functions tested and found in service*, over a signature he cannot read.

Kendra waits while he reads all four pages. It is the first time since October she has watched him read something on a screen to the end.

It is a good report. He has signed off on worse from men he trusted.

“Call the dock again,” he says. She does. It rings twenty times, and nobody answers. She puts the receiver down and says nothing.

It is two minutes past two. The crew have been standing in the cold for twenty-four minutes.

He calls the supervisor.

The supervisor answers on the fourth ring. He has the voice of a man who has been asleep and has been expecting a call like this for a year. Clyde tells him in order, as he would on a radio: the time, the amps, the direction, the flash, the burn, the dock, the form. The

supervisor listens without interrupting. When Clyde is done there is a silence on the line, then the small sound of a man sitting up in bed.

"Did the engine flag it?"

"It classified it."

"As what."

"Induced. Within margin."

"Grounds on?"

"Grounds on."

"Then they're protected." The supervisor yawns and stops himself. "Clyde. Note it. Get the hub's man on the phone and ask him what his bank did. Keep the crew on the ground till you're satisfied, if you want. But if you pull the first retirement on the corridor over a sensor reading the engine has already explained, the regional desk is going to want to hear why from you, and I'm going to want to be able to tell them you had something better than a feeling." A pause. "It's your clearance. You know what I'd do."

"I know."

"Grounds on," the supervisor says again, more gently. "That's the whole reason we put them on."

Clyde has heard that before.

He was thirty. The man who said it is long dead. It was the Sand Lick line, in its first years, and the grounds were on. A lineman took one off to make a reach. A tie at the far end that was supposed to be open was not, and nobody had told the man at the tie. Clyde had not written that clearance. He had read it out, a young operator reading for an older one. Afterwards he heard the foreman come back on the radio, and he did not recognise the voice.

"I know," Clyde says, and hangs up.

Kendra has not looked away from him. "If you want to pull them," she says, "I meant it."

"I know you did."

He looks at the board. Harmon Run is gray. The creek corridor is green and ordinary again, since the campus's second feed went off it

at one forty-one, when the engine finished its first step. Circuit Nine is gray from the yard to the gray box of the hub. Nothing on the board has moved since one thirty-eight. Nothing on the board says anything at all.

He picks up the handset.

“Kowalczyk, Valley Control.”

“Valley Control, Kowalczyk.” Andy answers at once. He has been standing in the yard with the radio in his hand for thirty-four minutes.

“Kowalczyk, we logged a two-second event on the hub service switch at zero one thirty-eight. Engine classifies it as induced current off the corridor staging. Your grounds took it. Keep your grounds on. Clearance stands. You may return your crew to the structure.” He lets the key up, and presses it again. “Andy. If you see anything else. Anything. You call me.”

Andy reads it back. Clearance stands. Grounds stay on. Return to the structure. Anything, call.

There is a question Clyde could ask now. He knows the drawings for the Nine getaway, because he went through them in December. He knows the second bay sits tight against the line-side set. He knows what a crew does when it runs out of room inside its grounds. But the clearance is Andy’s. What a crew does inside its own clearance has been the crew’s to decide since before Clyde’s time. An operator who reaches into another man’s clearance with questions is an operator who does not trust the man he gave it to.

He lets the key go.

He takes the notebook out of his shirt pocket. It is the size of his palm, with a rubber band around it. It is the same kind of notebook he has carried on every shift of his working life, since before there was anywhere else to keep the readings he did not believe. He writes with the pencil from the order.

*01:38 – Nine. 612 A OUT of hub svc sw, 2.1 s. Flash on line-side set H.R.
per Kowalczyk. Burn B ph. Hub lost bldg, on gen. Engine: induced. Hub*

lead not reached. Supv: carry on. Grounds on. Crew returned 02:12.

He looks at the word *out* for a while. Then he puts the band back around the notebook and puts the notebook in his pocket.

Kendra has watched him write, but she does not say anything about paper. In the corner of her screen the number is green. CCUM: 100.0%. The clock under it is still counting clean minutes, a hundred and forty of them now.

Andy

They lose thirty-four minutes on the ground. They cannot get them back.

Andy knows it the moment they go up again. The cold has got into the men while they stood. Earl climbs slower than he did at midnight. It takes him two tries to clip his lanyard at the top. When he gets there he leans back on it a long moment before he picks up the cutters. The younger journeyman fumbles the tag line twice. Only Kyle is quick. Kyle goes up the lower arm as if the flash had wound him tighter. He hangs off it talking about induction. The corridor overhead. The video in second year. Earl tells him from the top to save it for the report.

At half past two the top bus on the first bay is still not down.

Earl has one section left. The last length of aluminium tube on the top crossarm. The bolts on it are the old ones, put in the year the yard was built and never turned since. He cuts them one at a time. Andy stands on the gravel and keeps his light on him. He cannot stop keeping his light on him. Earl leans back on the lanyard between every cut now. Once, as Andy watches, the cutter slips on a bolt head. Earl's arm goes out wide into the air above the drop. The bolt comes loose and falls, turning, past Kyle's shoulder on the lower arm. It rings off the gravel three feet from Andy's boots.

Nobody says anything. Earl gets his arm back. He sits still on the lanyard a moment. Then he raps his knuckles twice on the steel beside him and goes back to it.

"I can take the top," Kyle calls up. "If you want to swap."

"I want you to hush," Earl says, without looking down.

"You good?" Andy calls up.

"I'm good."

"Earl."

"I said I'm good."

The line-side set is the only thing holding the line to the ground now. Andy has known it since one o'clock. That was when Earl cut the last jumper between the bus and the line conductors. The bus went its own way, down into the breaker-side set. The three line wires going out along the span towards the fence were left hanging off the structure. Nothing on them but the line-side clamps. That is how it should be. That is how the procedure has it. The line-side set is on and tight. It did its job at one thirty-eight with a crack like a rifle, and nobody hurt. In a few minutes it has to come off. All three clamps. It has to go out past the second bay, three feet farther than the drawings said. The drawings were wrong. Kyle found it.

At two forty-six the last section comes loose and swings into the sling. They lower it. It lies on the gravel with the others.

"Eleven," Kyle says.

Nobody tells him not to count.

"Grounds," Andy says.

Kyle is already moving. Down the lower arm to the ladder. Down the ladder to the ground. Across the gravel to the truck, where the hot stick lies on the tailgate beside the tester head. He picks up the stick. He looks at the tester. Andy watches him look at it. It sits where Kyle set it down after the test before midnight. Its little light is dark. It is the head that fits the end of the stick in place of the clamp. You put it on a wire before you trust the wire.

Kyle leaves it there. He goes back to the ladder with the stick over his shoulder, and climbs.

To test the conductor where the set is going, he would have to climb up with the tester head. Test. Climb down. Swap heads. Climb up again. Four minutes, maybe five, with the cold in his hands. Andy does the sum without meaning to. It is two forty-nine.

From the top crossarm Earl looks down at Kyle coming up. "You got the tester up here?"

"Tested it before midnight," Kyle says. "Same wire. Nobody's switched anything."

Earl doesn't answer him. He looks down past Kyle, into the floodlight, at Andy.

Andy looks back up at him.

There are a number of things Andy knows, standing there. He knows the procedure. He knows it better than Kyle and exactly as well as Earl. He knows the line has been dead since twenty to midnight. Tested dead on all three phases, the stick in Kyle's hands, Andy calling it on the radio. He knows what Clyde Miller has told him. The grounds took whatever it was at one thirty-eight. The engine has explained it. Keep the grounds on and go back to work. He knows the set will be off the wire for ninety seconds. He knows it is two forty-nine. The window closes at four. There is still the whole second bay to come down after this. He knows what his father would say. He can hear it.

The summer he was nineteen he was on his father's crew, the one season the union allowed. He went up a pole at the bottom of a dead-end road with the stick in his hand and the tester still on the truck. The line was dead. Everybody on the crew had heard it called dead. It was hot. The truck was forty yards off. He was ten feet up when his father said his name. Not loud. His father never said anything loud. He came down. His father took the stick out of his hands and held it, and said, *Say it*. And Andy said it. The whole procedure, at the bottom of the pole, with his hooks on and the crew standing around pretending not to listen. When he got to test *before touch* his father said, *Every time?* Andy said, *Every time*, and his father said, *Every time you put a hand where you haven't looked*, and gave him back the stick. He sent him to the truck for the tester.

That night at the kitchen table his father told Clyde about it. Clyde did not say anything. He nodded, and drank his coffee.

Andy says nothing.

Earl holds his look a second longer. Then he turns back to the top crossarm. There is nothing left for him to do up there now but coil the sling.

Kyle takes the line-side clamps off one at a time with the stick. A, then B, then C. Each one comes free of the conductor with a small hard click. The click carries across the yard in the fog. He lets each clamp hang on its lead from the arm beside him. On B, where the pit is, he stops. He puts his light on the burn and says "huh" to himself. He goes on.

The clamps hang from the arm. The line-side set is off the wire. For the first time since before midnight, the three line conductors going out over the fence towards the creek road are touching nothing but air and their insulators. Nothing but those and, two miles away, whatever is at the other end.

Andy knows it. It is in the procedure as a sentence with a box beside it. It is the minute and a half the procedure is written around. On top of the structure Earl has stopped coiling the sling. He is sitting back on his lanyard with the rope in his lap. He is watching Kyle go out along the crossarm. His face in the floodlight is one Andy has not seen on him in eleven years of working together.

The younger journeyman has let go of the tag line.

Then the reach.

He goes out along the lower crossarm on his belly. The frost on the steel melts under his jacket. The drop is open under him to the lit gravel. His lanyard pays out behind him around the arm. He has the stick in his right hand with the first clamp on it. He goes three feet farther than anyone planned, to the point on the span where the set has to go. The conductor there hangs a foot beyond easy reach. It moves a little in the air coming up the creek. He tries for it with the stick. The clamp swings off. He tries again. The wire drifts.

He takes his left hand off the crossarm, the gloved hand. He reaches out and puts it on the conductor to hold it still.

Andy sees the glove on the wire.

It is a leather glove. A work glove, the kind you wear on dead line. The line is dead. Under Kyle, the crossarm he lies along is bolted to the copper grid buried under the gravel. Every piece of steel in the yard is bolted to it. The glove holds the wire steady. The stick comes up with the clamp open. Kyle says, "There you go, there you go," to the wire, under his breath, and starts to seat it.

The jaw closes on the frost on the conductor and skids off. He opens it and tries again, his glove still on the wire. The jaw skids again on the weathered aluminium. He says something to it, low and patient. He works the stick a half-turn to find the bite.

Andy looks at his watch. Two fifty-two.

In his jacket, his phone begins to ring.

Wade

Number three is dying. At two thirty-eight his lead says so, standing beside it on the pad, in words Wade has not heard him use before.

"It'll go inside the half hour. Maybe sooner. And when it goes at this load, it takes two and five with it. I can't hold them."

They have to put their heads together to hear each other. Number three's note has gone ragged. A roar with a catch in it every few seconds. The exhaust off its stack is darker than the others', a brown smudge in the white going up into the pad lights. The lead holds the laser thermometer to a vent on the housing and shows Wade the number. The next one he does not bother to show him.

"How long if I shed?"

"Shed what? You've shed everything but the lights." The lead wipes his face with the back of his glove. "And if it goes, and the other two go with it, you've lost the building again, and I'm not bringing six cold sets back onto a bus in the dark in under ten minutes. Not twice in one night. You'll have that sorter down half an hour."

Wade looks past him to the fence. Past the fence, the utility's pole in the service yard with its switch and its meter. The line going off along the creek road into the fog, towards a yard he has never seen.

"Hold it," he says. "I'm working on it."

He goes back up to his office off the mezzanine, where the bank's numbers come up on the laptop and the window looks down over the sort floor. The sort floor is running again, lane after lane, as if nothing had happened at one thirty-eight. Ninety-one.

Ninety-three. Number three's temperature line climbing in red along the bottom of the screen like a tide coming in.

On the whiteboard across from his desk, in the corner, small: *Relay – restore.*

He does not look at it. It is part of the wall. He looks at the laptop. Ninety-three. The red line, climbing.

His phone buzzes on the desk. A text from his wife. She does not sleep well when he is on a bad night, and she always knows when he is on one. *Awake. You ok?*

He types *Fine. Home at 6.* Looks at it. Sends it.

A knock on the open door. The dock supervisor, still in her coat. Face raw from the cold. Gloves in one hand.

"I've called you eleven times," she says.

"I know."

"My people have been standing in an open door with no heat for two hours. I've got a girl out there who can't hold a scanner."

"Twenty minutes," Wade says. "Everything's back at three."

"You said twenty minutes an hour ago." She looks at him. "And the power company rang the dock phone. Some man. He wants you to call him. He said it was urgent."

Something moves in Wade's chest. Goes still.

"What did he want."

"He didn't say. He asked if we lost the building around twenty to two. I told him we did." She is already turning. "He didn't leave a number. He said you'd have it."

She goes. Wade sits looking at the empty doorway.

The only number he has for the power company is the one on the Tier One card taped to the side of his monitor. He dials it. Two rings. A recorded woman. His call is important to them. For outages he should visit the customer portal. His call may be recorded for quality purposes. Then music. The utility is the last place he knows that still plays music at you while you wait. He listens to the music for two minutes, eyes on the red line climbing at the bottom of his

screen.

He knows what the man wants. He has known since the doorway. The man wants to know what happened at one thirty-eight. The man has seen something on his side, something with a time on it, and wants Wade to tell him what it was. Wade will tell him it was a generator fault. That is what the log says. The man will ask what kind. Wade will say the bank tripped, which is true. The man will ask what it tripped on.

The music stops. Starts again. He hangs up.

He'll call after three. After three the building will be on the line and off the bank, and the man can ask him anything he likes. After three. Everything is easier after three.

His cell rings in his hand. Columbus.

"Wade. Good news." The regional lead sounds more awake than he has all night. Relieved. "Portal just updated. Corridor Seven's gone to active, Sand Lick transfer's confirmed. It's all green. You're released to resume grid."

"It says three o'clock."

"It says active. It changed a minute ago. Three's the schedule. Active is the state." The dishwasher has finished; the kitchen behind him is quiet. "How's the bank?"

"Three's going."

"Then get off it. Listen to me. You've done the night. You held it. Nobody on the network will ever know it was close. Get the building on the line and shut those things down before one of them catches fire and I've got that to explain as well." The voice softens. "Go on. Go home at six."

He hangs up.

Wade stands at the office window. Below him three hundred people are moving parcels through the night. Heads down, hands moving, scanners chirping at the ends of the lanes. None of them knows the building was carried on its own for six hours. None of them knows it went dark for five minutes at one thirty-eight

because of anything but bad luck.

Down the stairs. The switchgear room.

Two fifty-one. The amber lamp on the utility-side panel is lit.

He stops in the doorway. A steady low amber under its hood, exactly as it was at one thirty-eight. Beside it the utility meter shows something. Not much. Wandering a little. The portal says confirmed. The lamp says there is voltage on the line. Two things telling him the same thing inside the same minute. A man in Columbus with a green screen. Number three's roar coming through the cinder block from the pad, rougher now. Missing.

He looks at the utility meter. He makes himself look at it. The needle is where it should be. A hair right of zero.

He remembers where it was at one thirty-eight.

He crosses to the relay cabinet. Takes out his key. Opens it. The two relays sit in their housings as they have sat for six years, their small displays lit. Between two terminals on the back plane, where the drawings show nothing at all, a short length of gray twelve-gauge wire. Stripped at both ends. Holding tight.

He remembers putting it there. A Monday, after seven. The building loud on the other side of the wall, this room quiet. He stood in front of the open cabinet with the vendor's manual folded back to the terminal diagram and the wire in his hand, and said out loud to nobody, *temporary*. He remembers saying it. He remembers thinking that saying it out loud made it more so. In the morning he wrote it on the whiteboard, so it would be written down somewhere. So that if anyone ever asked, he could show them he had known.

He could take it out. Two screws. Ten seconds. With it out, the sync check comes back. When he turns the handle on the main breaker the relay will look at the line. If the line is really there, it will let him close. If it is not, it will refuse him, and he will know. It is the simplest thing in the room. It is what the relay is for.

He thinks of the man at the utility, asking what the bank tripped on.

He thinks of the needle hard against the left-hand stop.

If he takes the wire out and the relay refuses him, then one thirty-eight was what it was.

He closes the cabinet. Locks it. Puts the key in his pocket, and feels the weight of it there against his leg.

Then he walks across the switchgear room to the panel where the lamp is lit.

Clyde

At two fifty Clyde watches the engine begin the second staging step on the board.

There is nothing to see. A line of green text comes up in the event list, CORRIDOR 7 STAGING, STEP 2 OF 2. On the wall board the heavy line of the creek corridor thickens a shade as the campus's second feed comes across onto it. At the bottom of the valley the flat bar of the campus does not change, since its load is the same on either wire. Under the corridor, the thin gray of Circuit Nine runs its two miles to the hub without changing either.

Kendra is writing her part of the log. She has been at it since half past two, in short neat lines. Every few minutes she stops to read back what she has written, with her lips moving slightly, as he taught her.

One thirty-six, step one. One thirty-eight, six hundred amps. One forty-one, step one ends. Two fifty, step two.

He does not know why he is lining them up. There is nothing to line up. The engine lined them up at one thirty-eight and wrote down what they meant.

He reads over Kendra's shoulder. Her line for two-twelve says: *Crew returned to structure per engine classification (induced, within margin) and on-call supervisor guidance. Grounds confirmed on. Operator C. Miller.* It is correct in every word. It is better than he would have written it. There is nothing in it about six hundred amps going the wrong way. According to the engine, six hundred amps did not go the wrong way, and the engine's reading is the one that goes on the log.

His own reading is in his shirt pocket, under a rubber band.

He has kept those notebooks since his first winter. There are thirty-some of them in a shoebox in the hall closet at home. When his wife asked him once what was in them, he told her the numbers he didn't believe. She said that sounded like most of a life, and he laughed, because she meant it as a joke. Nobody has ever read them. Nobody has ever asked to. They are not the record.

It is two fifty-one. There are nine minutes to Sand Lick, and sixty-nine to the end of the window. Somewhere in the yard at Harmon Run, Andy's crew are on the steel in the fog.

Kendra has come to the same times in her log. She has set them one under another down the margin. Then her hands stop on the keys. She looks up at him.

"Clyde," she says.

He is taking out his phone. She sees it in his hand. She does not say the rest. She looks at the phone a moment longer, then back down at her screen, and her hands go on with the log.

The radio is recorded. Every word of it is kept on a server under the building for seven years, and the recording is how the job is supposed to be done. He has never called a man on a crew from this desk on his own phone. He finds the number anyway. Andy's number is in his phone because Andy's father put it there. That was at the Legion hall, at the old man's retirement dinner, with the bad sheet cake and the good speeches. At the end of the night the old man came over to Clyde's table on his ruined knees. He held his hand out for Clyde's phone, typed the number into it with one thick finger, slowly, and handed it back.

The boy's, he said. In case.

In case what.

In case, he said, and went back to his own table.

Kendra does not look up at the sound of the ringing.

It rings three times.

"Kowalczyk." Wind across the phone. An outdoor voice.

"It's Clyde."

A pause. "Valley Control?"

"It's Clyde," he says again. "Not the radio."

"Okay." Andy's voice changes, a little. "Okay. What's going on?"

He had something ready when he took the phone out of his pocket. Now that Andy is on the line it is gone. What comes out instead is, "How's your dad."

A small silence, with the wind in it. Then Andy almost laughs. "Knees. He says his knees are the only part of him that remembers the job. He asks after you."

"Tell him I asked."

"I'll tell him."

"Tell him," Clyde says, and stops, and starts again. "You know he's the one got me reading orders out loud. My first winter. I thought it was foolishness. He made me read one back to him in the break room before he'd let me key the radio, word for word, with the whole shift listening. Every night for a month."

"I didn't know that."

"Everybody thinks it's mine. It's his."

Andy doesn't say anything. There is a sound on the line Clyde can't place, a click, small and hard, carrying. Then Andy's voice comes, a little farther from the phone. "He used to make me say procedure before I went up. Every time. Out loud, at the bottom of the pole, with my hooks on."

"I know. He told me."

Neither of them says anything. Clyde can hear the yard. There is a voice far off, somebody murmuring under his breath, low and coaxing, like a man talking a horse into a trailer. There is the wind.

"How's the work," Clyde says.

"Fine. Bit behind."

"You'll make it?"

"We'll make it."

He has it now. It is right there. *Stand them down till I call you back.* Eight words. He could say them and hang up. He could pick up the radio and say them again on the record. The crew would come off the steel. The window would close at four with the second bay still standing. In the morning the regional desk would ask him why. He would open his notebook to a page with out on it, and a feeling.

He counts the words again. Eight.

"Andy," he says.

"Yeah."

"Keep your grounds close."

There is the smallest pause on the line.

"Copy that," Andy says.

The call ends. Clyde puts the phone face down on the desk beside the order, the pencil and the handset of the radio. The room is quiet. On the board the corridor is heavy and green, and Nine is gray all the way down to the hub. Andy's *copy that* is still in the room with him, as if the phone had been on speaker.

Kendra is not writing. She is looking at him.

"What did he say?"

"He said copy that."

Wade

Two fifty-five.

The lamp is lit. The portal is green. On the pad, number three is missing, a ragged roar through the wall with gaps in it.

Wade puts his hand on the main breaker handle and turns it.

It closes with the same sound as before, a car door in a good house. He braces for what came at one thirty-eight. The growl in the gear, the needles swinging, the brown light.

Nothing comes.

The bank's needles barely move. The frequency holds. The hum of the gear goes on at the same note. Under its hood the lamp brightens a little and holds there, steady. Beside it the utility meter sits almost exactly at zero, a hair to the left, and does not move.

He breathes out.

It worked. The line is there. Sand Lick is early. The portal was right. The lamp was right. He stands a moment with his hand still on the handle and lets it be over. Six hours. He held it. Now he can bring the bank down and let the utility take the building. Shut number three off before it shakes itself to pieces. Put the dock heaters back on for the girl who can't hold a scanner. Go home at six, as he told his wife.

He keys the radio. "We're on the line. Hold three as it is. I'm moving load off it from here."

A pause on the pad end. "Copy," his lead says. "About time."

He picks up the phone and dials the Tier One number, to tell somebody at the utility that the hub is back on their line. The recorded woman. Then the music. He sets the phone on top of the

panel with the music coming out of it, small and bright.

He goes to the bank panel. He starts bringing the sets down.

As they taught him in Ohio. One set at a time. Lower its output. Its share of the load moves off onto the line. That is what paralleling means. The utility is the big wheel and you are the small one. You ease off your wheel, and the big one takes the load without noticing, because it is the whole valley and you are one building.

He lowers the first set's output.

The frequency drops.

Not much. A tenth. A tenth is nothing on a bus this size. He looks at it. The load did not go to the line. The other sets took it between them. The utility meter has not moved.

He brings the first set back up. The frequency comes back.

Through the wall, number three misses. Catches. Misses.

Three. Of course it is three. A sick set on the bus drags everything with it. The governors on the others hunt to cover for it. The frequency wanders. Ask the bank to hand off load and it hands off badly. He has watched it happen. The plant in Ohio, a unit going the same way. A whole shift of numbers that would not settle, because one machine on the bus was dying and nobody had taken it off.

He keys the radio. "Take three off."

"Now?" The lead has to shout over it. "The others'll have to take its share."

"We're on the line. Take it off."

"Copy."

He waits. Hand flat on the panel. He watches the frequency while the lead brings number three down. Through the cinder block, its ragged note falls away. Stops. The pad goes from six voices to five. On the panel the frequency sags as the other five pick up three's load. Comes back as their governors find it.

Unloading three. That is all that was.

He picks up the phone from the top of the panel. The music is still playing. His call is still important. He puts it down again.

The second set. Slower this time. A little at a time. Watching.

The frequency drops the same tenth. The same tenth. The other sets take the load between them. The utility meter sits where it was. Once, while he watches, the needle shivers. A small tremor off its hair and back. He puts it down to three. The last of three, going out of the bus.

The utility's side is lightly loaded. He tells himself so. Sand Lick has closed the tie and not picked anything up yet. There is some order to how the utility does these things, an order he does not know and has never needed to. It is their line. They have their own reasons for what they do on it.

The third set. He lowers it. Holds it lowered. Does not bring it back, because bringing it back is what he did with the first one, and the first one proved nothing.

The frequency sits low. A tenth down. Two. It does not come back. It sits there. Nothing in the whole valley comes to pull it up.

The clock over the door. Two fifty-seven.

He stands very still. On top of the panel the phone plays its music.

There is no big wheel. There has not been one since he closed the breaker. When he eases off his own bank, nothing holds him up. The frequency is his. The voltage is his. The lamp under its hood is lit bright with his own power. The needle a hair to the left of zero is his too. Pointing out. A trickle going out through the pole in the service yard, along the creek road in the fog, two miles, to whatever is at the other end of Circuit Nine.

The building is on the bank, where it has been all night. Something else is on his line.

Eleven minutes past ten. A kitchen in Columbus. A tired man, telling him what the utility was doing tonight.

They want us to sit dark till three so they can take a substation apart.

Part Three

The Hum

Andy

Andy puts the phone back in his jacket and zips the pocket. He stands with his hand on it.

Keep your grounds close. Close was what they were doing. The set was coming off the wire so it could go back on three feet farther out. Three feet was close. Ninety seconds was close. The line had been dead since eight minutes to midnight on Clyde's own word. Moving a ground was not leaving it off. He has moved a hundred.

Up on the lower crossarm, Kyle still has nothing seated. Andy heard the jaw snap shut on air during the call. He heard Kyle tell it to behave. Kyle has the first clamp up at A, flat on his belly on the steel, his left glove closed around the conductor to steady it. The jaw will not bite. The wire out here is old and scaled with weather. The clamp skids off the scale each time he brings it up. Each time, Kyle says something to it, low and patient. He opens the jaw. He tries again.

On the top crossarm Earl has the sling half coiled in his lap. He is watching Kyle. The younger journeyman is watching Kyle. Andy is watching Kyle. It is two fifty-four, going on fifty-five. The window closes at four.

The yard is very quiet. Down the creek road, two miles off, the hub's diesels roar on in the fog.

Kyle tries again. The jaw skids.

"Take your time," Andy calls up.

"I've got it. It's the scale."

"Take your time."

Kyle talks while he works. He always talks. "It's the scale," he says again, to nobody, to the wire. "Forty years of weather on this. It's like trying to clamp a tree." He laughs at himself, a puff of white in the floodlight. "Earl. How long's this span been up?"

"Longer than you," Earl says from the top.

"Everything's longer than me."

He brings the clamp up again. It skids. He shifts his grip. His glove slides a few inches along the conductor towards the jaw, so he can hold the wire nearer the point. Andy watches the glove slide. He thinks nothing about it at all. It is a glove on a dead wire. The younger journeyman stamps his feet on the gravel to get the blood into them. Earl's breath goes up white past the floodlight. Two fifty-five.

The sound comes first.

It comes from the wire. A hiss. A crackle. Fat on a pan. It runs along the conductors out over the fence and back from the span, all around the structure at once, everywhere the line is. Andy knows it from every live line he has ever stood under in fog. It is the sound of voltage in wet air. It is the line coming alive. Under it, low, so low he feels it before he hears it, a buzz in the wire itself.

For one half of one second Andy does not understand it. His body does. His body has turned and his light has gone up, and it goes to the top crossarm, to Earl, because that is where it has been going all night.

Earl is there. Earl is sitting on his lanyard with the sling in his lap and his mouth open, looking down.

Andy's light follows Earl's face down.

Kyle has not let go. Kyle cannot let go. His left hand is closed on the A conductor and the current has closed it tighter and his body is locked straight along the crossarm from the glove to his boots, rigid, shaking, and at his hand where the leather meets the wire there is a light, small and blue-white and too bright to look at, and it spits, and there is smoke coming off the glove in the floodlight, thin, and a

smell in the cold air.

Kyle makes a sound. It is not a word.

The younger journeyman has not moved. He is standing at the foot of the structure with his hands open at his sides, looking up. His mouth is moving. Nothing is coming out of it.

“Kyle.”

Andy is running. He does not decide to run. He is at the truck and the rescue hook is in its brackets on the side of the bed, the long fibreglass stick with the crook on the end that every truck carries and nobody ever takes down, and he has it out of the brackets and he is running back across the gravel with it and the gravel is sliding under his boots, and Earl is shouting from the top of the structure, *Andy don't, don't touch him, Andy, he's hot, don't*, and Andy is on the ladder.

The rungs are frosted and his boot slides on the second one and he catches it and goes on, and on the fourth he can feel the buzz in the steel, in his palms, through his gloves, the whole structure singing faintly with it, and some part of him that is still a lineman says that the steel is bonded to the grid and the grid is at ground and the steel will not hurt him, and the rest of him does not care what the steel does.

He knows. He knows every word Earl is shouting, and he knows you do not go to a man on a live line, you call it in and you get the line killed and you wait, and he learned it in a classroom in Morgantown and at the bottom of a pole with his father holding the stick, and he has taught it to Kyle, and his hands and feet are on the rungs anyway, going up, the hook in the crook of his arm.

He comes up level with the lower crossarm, an arm's length from Kyle's boots, and he can see Kyle's face now, and Kyle's eyes are open and looking at the wire in front of his face, at his own hand on it, and they do not move to Andy, and his jaw is locked, and the sound is coming from behind his teeth, and Andy puts the hook out along the steel towards Kyle's harness to take the belt and pull, to

break the hand off the wire any way he can, and as the fibreglass comes near, the thing at Kyle's glove flares.

It goes white and there is a crack, a smaller cousin of the one at one thirty-eight, and heat hits Andy's face like an open oven door and the light is inside his eyes and he is hanging off the ladder by one arm with the hook gone somewhere below him on the gravel and his face burning and the backs of his hands burning where the cuffs of his gloves end.

He cannot see. He can hear. The hiss on the wire. The buzz under it. Kyle, still making the sound.

His free hand finds the radio on his shoulder. His thumb finds the key.

"Valley Control, Harmon Run." His own voice, strange. "The line's hot. The line's hot. Man on the line."

Clyde

It takes him a second to know the voice.

It comes out of the desk speaker in the dark room over the river. It is Andy's voice, and it is not. For a second Clyde is thirty. He is in another chair beside another man, hearing a foreman he has worked with for years say something on the radio in a voice he has never heard him use. Then it is Andy. It is Andy Kowalczyk, and he is saying *the line's hot, and man on the line*. The key is still open behind the words. Through it comes the sound of the yard. Somebody far off is shouting a man's name. Under the shouting there is a hiss, a crackle, and a buzz.

Clyde is on his feet.

Kendra has turned in her chair. Her face in the light of the screens is the face of someone who has understood a sum half a second before she wanted to.

On the wall board Circuit Nine is gray. It is gray from Harmon Run the whole two miles down the creek road to the hub. It has not changed. The board says there is nothing on that line. The board is drawn from the telemetry. The telemetry at Harmon Run comes off the breaker. The breaker is open. A man is on the line.

"Kendra. Hub service switch. Voltage."

She has it before he finishes. Her hands are already moving. "Nine line side at the hub switch." She reads it off the screen, then reads it again because she does not believe it. "Seven point one kV. Phase to ground. All three phases. Full line voltage." Her voice goes very flat. "Current out of the customer. Six amps. Seven. It's the hub, Clyde. It's the hub."

“I know it’s the hub.”

He knows. He has known since one thirty-eight. He has it written down in his shirt pocket, under a rubber band. There is no time now to know anything but where the line can be opened.

He goes down the board in his head, as fast as he has ever gone down anything. First, the Harmon Run Nine breaker. It is open already. The fault is on the far side of it. Second, the grounds. They are off, or the line would not be hot. Third, the crew. They are on the steel. Next, two miles of Nine down the creek road. Not one switch on it answers to this room and can open it. Nobody ever put one there, because Nine was a feeder from a yard to a hub, and the yard was the switch. Next, the Sand Lick tie. It answers to this room. It is open. Closing it would only put more on the line. Last, at the far end, the hub. The hub’s main breaker answers to the hub. Between that breaker and the line, on the utility’s pole in the hub’s service yard, is the utility’s switch.

His switch.

It is the only thing on two miles of wire that he can reach from this chair.

He reaches for the mouse. His hand is steady. He notices that it is steady. He pulls the switch up on his own screen. Its box comes up in a window: *HUB SVC SW 7-114. CLOSED.* Under it, in amber, is the lock he read at a quarter to ten with his finger on it.

*TIER 1 CONTRACTED LOAD – RESTORATION PATH PROTECTED –
OPERATION REQUIRES SUPERVISOR AUTHORISATION.*

Behind him Kendra is on the other phone, the emergency line. Her voice is steady and slow and correct. She is doing it as the card on the wall says to do it. “Electrical contact injury. One casualty, possibly more. Harmon Run substation, off Creek Road, west of the county road. Harmon Run. H-A-R-M-O-N. Creek Road. Gate’s open. Crew on site. Harmon Run.” She says the name of the yard twice more, as the card says, so it cannot be misheard.

On the event list a new line comes up in amber. It comes eleven seconds after Andy's voice.

HUB SVC SW 7-114 – CUSTOMER-SIDE EVENT – UNDER
INVESTIGATION.

The radio is still open. The hiss goes on. The buzz goes on. Somebody in the yard, Earl, is shouting Andy's name. Andy is not answering.

Clyde sits down again, because the keyboard is lower than his hands, and puts his hands on it.

Clyde

Under the lock, in smaller type, there is a second line. He has read it before. Everyone who has sat at this desk has read it once, in training, as you read the part of the manual that covers what to do if the building is on fire.

*Supervisor code – or – Operator emergency override (Sec. 11.4).
Operator assumes personal responsibility for Tier 1 curtailment
breach. Subject to mandatory review.*

He has never used it. He does not know anyone who has. The supervisor is twenty minutes away in his car, if he is in his car. His code is in his head. A phone call to wake him is a minute Clyde does not have.

Kendra sees what is on his screen. She has the emergency line against her ear, with the dispatcher talking in it. She looks at the window with the second line lit under his cursor. She knows what it is, because she wrote the tests for it. She does not say anything. She reaches over with her free hand and puts it on the back of his chair. She leaves it there.

Clyde clicks the second line.

The window asks for his operator number. He types it. It is the number he has typed at the start of every shift since they took the paper logbooks away, four digits and his initials. The window asks for his password. He types that. The window holds for a moment. Then a new field opens under a line of text.

JUSTIFICATION (may be completed after action):

He tabs past it.

CONFIRM: OPEN HUB SVC SW 7-114? THIS ACTION WILL BREACH
CORRIDOR 7 RESTORATION PATH.

He clicks.

On the wall board, down at the hub's end of Circuit Nine, a small box changes from green to gray.

In the speaker, the hiss stops. The buzz in the wire goes with it. It is there, and then it is not, all at once. In the open radio there is only wind, and a man breathing hard. Far off a voice, Earl's, is saying *it stopped, it's stopped, Andy, it's stopped.*

Kendra has the phone to her ear. She has turned in her chair to look at the board. The voltage at the hub switch has gone to zero on her screen. She does not say it. He can see it.

"Kowalczyk, Valley Control." Clyde's voice comes out of him as it has come out of him on every shift, level and slow, every word in its place. "Hub service switch is open. Circuit Nine is de-energised from the hub. Nothing is feeding your line. Acknowledge."

A breath in the speaker. Then Andy, thick. "It's dead. It's dead. Going up."

"Andy. Test it."

"He's up there, Clyde—"

"Test it before anybody touches him. You don't know what else is on that line. I don't know. Test it. Then ground it. Then go up." He hears himself. He hears whose voice it is. "Say it back."

Silence in the speaker. The wind. Then, in the yard, somebody running on gravel.

"Tester's coming," says one of the journeymen, out of breath, close to Andy's radio. "I've got it. Give me the stick."

"Testing," Andy says. He is not the one holding the stick. Clyde can tell by where the voice comes from. "Testing A. A phase, dead. B, dead. C, dead."

"Ground it."

"The set's right there. The set's hanging off the arm. Earl's got it."

"Put it on."

Clyde listens to them put it on. It takes forty seconds. He does not say anything while they do it. Nothing he could say would make their hands go faster. He has heard too many men say things on too many radios to make hands go faster. He stands again. He does not sit back down.

“Grounded,” Andy says.

“Go up.”

The key releases. The radio clicks shut.

Kendra holds the phone away from her ear. “Fourteen minutes,” she says. “They’re coming from town. Fourteen.”

He nods.

On the wall board the clock ticks over to three o’clock. At three o’clock the engine does what it was built to do. A line comes up in green, CORRIDOR 7 – SAND LICK TIE – READY TO CLOSE – AWAITING OPERATOR. A second later, under it in red, comes the first red line Clyde has seen on this system since it was installed:

RESTORATION PATH BREACHED (OPERATOR OVERRIDE, SEC. 11.4).
CORRIDOR 7 TRANSFER ABORTED.

“Sand Lick’s asking for the tie,” Kendra says. Her voice is small.

“Hold the tie,” Clyde says. “Nothing closes on Nine. Nothing. Not till I say.”

“Holding.”

The radio opens. It is the younger journeyman, doing his best to do it properly and not managing.

“Valley Control, Harmon Run. We’ve got him down. We got him down on the sling. He’s not breathing. Earl’s doing compressions. Earl started compressions at, at three oh one. Andy’s hurt. His face. He’s doing compressions too.” A breath that is almost something else. “Valley Control, he’s not breathing.”

“Copy,” Clyde says. “Not breathing, compressions started zero three zero one. You’re doing right. Keep doing it. Ambulance is thirteen minutes out, coming from town. The gate is open. I’m holding everything on Nine. Nothing is going to close on you.” He

lets the key up and presses it again. "Take turns. Count out loud. Don't stop till they take him off you."

"Copy," the voice says, and the radio closes.

Behind him Kendra is saying it into the phone, word for word. *Not breathing. CPR in progress since three oh one.* She says it twice.

Nobody calls again. He did not expect anybody to. He stands with the handset in his hand. The radio is closed. The board is gray from end to end. In the corner of Kendra's screen, where he does not look, there is a number that is no longer green.

Wade

Two fifty-seven and some seconds. Wade's hand is going to the handle of the main breaker when the needle on the utility meter moves.

It comes off the left of zero. Settles on zero exactly. The trickle has stopped.

He stands with his hand an inch from the handle and looks at it.

The lamp is still lit. It stays lit. The short run of cable between the utility's pole and this breaker is still his, still fed from his bank through the closed breaker. The lamp is looking at that cable, seeing his voltage on it, saying so. But the needle says nothing is going out. Whatever was drawing on the end of his line has stopped drawing. He thinks of the needle shivering. The tremor he gave to three. Three was already off the bus.

He does not know what that means. He tries to think what it means.

The man at the utility, asking what the bank tripped on. The dock supervisor in his doorway. *He asked if we lost the building around twenty to two.* The man knew about twenty to two. The man had been asking about it for an hour. Either the thing at the end of Circuit Nine stopped taking current, or somebody opened the line between here and there. He cannot tell which. No meter in this room can tell him which. Either. Or. He stands there and understands that he will not know which until somebody comes and tells him. Whoever comes will know already.

He turns the handle. The main breaker opens with its bang. Under its hood the lamp goes dark.

Nothing else happens. Through the wall, the five sets on the pad go on roaring. Past the other wall, the building goes on running. He can hear the sorter, the long rising note of it spinning through a lane change. The conveyors. Somewhere out on the floor, somebody laughing. Nobody in the building knows that anything has happened. The lights did not so much as flicker. They have been on the bank all night. They are on the bank now.

On top of the panel the phone plays its music.

August. The contractor who tested the relays was a heavy, cheerful man from Pittsburgh. He whistled while he worked. He ran every function twice because, he said, he had seen what happened when people ran them once. When he was done he filled in the form on his tablet, signed it, turned the tablet around for Wade to sign under him. Wade signed. His own name, under a man who ran everything twice. That form is the one the utility has. Somewhere up the ridge, tonight, somebody will have read it.

His cell buzzes in his pocket. Columbus.

"Wade. What was that? I saw your frequency sag on the dashboard, three separate times, and then the portal just went red. Transfer aborted. It says operator override on their side. What happened? Are you on the line or aren't you?"

Wade holds the phone and looks at the dark lamp.

"Wade?"

He takes the phone away from his ear. Ends the call. Puts the phone face down on the panel beside the other one.

The music stops.

"Tier One Customer Care." A woman's voice. Young, tired, three in the morning in some office a long way off. "Thank you for holding. Are you calling to report an outage?"

He picks the other phone up.

"This is the fulfilment hub," he says. "On Circuit Nine. The line from Harmon Run."

"Yes, sir."

"I put my generators on your line."

A pause. He hears her typing. "Are you reporting an interruption to your service, sir?"

"No. I put power on your line. There's a crew on it. I think there's a crew on it. I put six generators on it."

"I'm sorry, sir, I'm not sure I understand. Could I take the account number?"

He reads it off the Tier One card taped to his monitor. The card is upstairs. He is down here. He finds he knows it. She reads it back. She asks for the name on the account. He gives it. She says she is going to open a ticket, that somebody from operations will be in touch. She asks whether there is anything else she can help him with today.

"No," he says.

"Thank you for calling. Have a good night."

He puts the phone down.

He takes the other one, his own, from beside it. Looks at the screen. *Awake. You ok?* is still there, above his answer. *Fine. Home at 6.* He reads his own answer to her. He does not write anything under it.

Outside, on the county road beyond the fence, a siren is coming. He hears it through the cinder block before he can place it. Rising, falling. It comes up from the direction of town. It goes past the hub's gate without slowing, on up the creek road into the fog, towards Harmon Run. Fades.

He listens until there is nothing left of it to listen to, and then for a while after that.

The dock supervisor is in the doorway. He did not hear her come down the stairs. Her coat is open now, her gloves gone. She is holding a scanner in one hand as if she forgot to put it down.

"The heaters," she says. "You said three."

"Put them on," Wade says. "Put everything on."

"The bank—"

“Put everything on.”

She looks at him. Whatever she sees in his face makes her stop asking. She goes back up the stairs.

A minute later, through the wall, he hears the pad take the load of the dock heaters. All five sets deepen their note together. He does not look at the meters to see what it costs them.

His cell buzzes on the panel, face down. It stops. It buzzes again. He lets it. Columbus, or the dock, or his wife. He does not turn it over to see which.

He goes to the relay cabinet. Unlocks it. Opens it.

The two relays in their housings, small displays lit. Between the two terminals of the test-block input, the gray wire.

He takes it out. It comes away easily; he never tightened the screws as far as a thing meant to stay. Twelve inches of twelve-gauge wire, stripped at both ends, in his hand. It weighs nothing. On the relays the displays change. A small green light comes on that has not been on in three weeks.

He looks at the wire for a long time.

Then he puts it back. Same two terminals. He tightens the screws down, as far as they will go this time. The green light goes out.

He does not close the cabinet. He leaves the door standing open with the key in the lock. Whoever comes will not have to ask him for it. They will see it the moment they walk into the room.

He sits down on the floor of the switchgear room, his back against the cabinet beside it. The concrete is cold through his trousers. He puts his hands flat on it, either side of him, and leaves them there.

Through one wall, the bank roars.

Through the other, the building runs. Bright and loud and yellow. Three hundred people moving parcels through the night.

The door opens once. His lead stands in it, ear defenders around his neck, soot on his face from the pad. He looks at the open cabinet. The gray wire in it. Wade on the floor. He was in this room

the day the bank was commissioned. He knows what lives in that cabinet. He looks. Then he says, "The five are holding," and goes back out. The door swings shut on the roar behind him.

Wade waits for them.

Andy

They get him down with Earl's sling.

Earl has it coiled already, on the top crossarm, and there is nobody alive who can rig a sling faster than Earl Haught, and he comes down the steel to Kyle with it without being told, and Andy cannot see well, his eyes are full of white shapes and his face feels as if it is still in front of the oven door, but he can see enough to see Earl's hands on the rope, fast and sure, the hands of a man who has done this a thousand times with pieces of steel and has not done it with a man, and Earl passes the sling under Kyle's arms and cinches it and cuts his lanyard, and Andy and the younger journeyman take the rope at the bottom, and they lower him as they lowered the sections all night, hand over hand on the tag line, down through the lit air to the gravel.

The rope runs through Andy's burnt hands and he feels every inch of it and does not let go, and above him Earl guides the sling down the steel with one arm around Kyle's chest, climbing down beside him rung by rung and talking to him the whole way, low, as Kyle talked to the wire, *there you go, there you go, easy now, I've got you.*

He is very light. That is the first thing. Andy has carried Kyle's end of a crossarm and Kyle has carried his. He knows what Kyle weighs.

They lay him on the frozen gravel under the floodlights. His left glove is burnt through at the palm. His face is gray. He is not breathing.

Earl is kneeling beside him before Andy is, and Earl has his own gloves off and is tearing Kyle's jacket open, the zip and the snaps under it, and has two fingers at Kyle's throat and holds them there and shakes his head once, and puts the heel of one bare hand in the middle of Kyle's chest and the other hand on top of it and starts.

"One. Two. Three. Four."

Earl counts out loud. He counts as they teach you to count in the course every two years, which nobody ever takes seriously, with the plastic dummy on the floor of the union hall. He counts to thirty. He tips Kyle's head back and breathes into him twice. He starts again.

"One. Two. Three."

"Let me," Andy says.

"You can't see. Sit down."

"I can see."

"Then take the next one. On thirty. Count with me."

Andy counts with him, and on thirty he takes it, and he kneels on the gravel and puts his burnt hands where Earl's were and pushes, and it hurts, and he keeps pushing and counts and Earl breathes, and the younger journeyman is on the radio to Clyde, Andy hears him far off giving the time and the state, *not breathing, doing compressions, since three oh one*, and on thirty Earl takes it back and on thirty Andy takes it again.

Andy's own phone is ringing in his jacket. It has been ringing on and off since before three. The superintendent. Andy told him he would call him back. On a count of thirty, while Andy takes the chest, Earl reaches across and unzips Andy's pocket and takes the phone out and answers it.

"This is Earl Haught," he says. "Kyle Yoder's had a contact at Harmon Run. We're doing CPR. Call the office." He listens a second. "I don't know," he says, and hangs up, and drops the phone on the gravel, and takes the chest back on thirty.

Kyle's phone buzzes in the inside pocket of his torn jacket.

It buzzes against Andy's knee and goes on buzzing, and it stops and starts again, and nobody reaches for it. Andy counts. He does not look at the jacket. He knows who calls a lineman at three in the morning. Somebody who knows he is on a night job. Somebody awake with a five-month-old, who wants to hear his voice on his break. The phone stops.

"Twenty-eight. Twenty-nine. Thirty."

Earl takes it.

It goes on, minutes, round after round, thirty and two, thirty and two, the gravel grinding into Andy's knees through his trousers and the cold coming up through them and his arms burning and then going past burning into something that does not feel like arms, and Earl's breath going into Kyle and coming back out of him white and nothing else coming out, and the floodlights humming on the truck, which is the only hum now in the yard, and twice Andy thinks he feels something under his hands and stops, and Earl says, *Keep going, that's you, that's your own pulse in your hands, keep going*, and Andy keeps going.

The ambulance comes at fourteen minutes past three. It comes through the open gate and across the gravel with its lights turning red and white on the frost and the steel. Two medics come out of it with their bags already open. One of them takes Earl's place on Kyle's chest without a word. Earl kneels back on his heels. He puts his bare hands on his thighs and stays there. The other medic puts pads on Kyle. A machine starts to talk in a calm woman's voice, telling everybody to stand clear. Everybody stands clear. The machine thinks about it. It says no shock is advised. It says to continue compressions.

The second medic looks at Andy's face.

"You need to sit in the truck. Your eyes. Your hands."

"When you've got him."

"We've got him."

"When you've got him," Andy says.

The medic looks at him a moment, and turns back to Kyle.

They work on Kyle for nearly half an hour on the gravel. A second ambulance comes. Then a sheriff's car. Then a second sheriff's car. The yard fills up with turning lights and people who do not belong in it. Andy stands where a foreman stands, where he can see all of them. Earl stands beside him. The younger journeyman is sitting on the tailgate beside the tester head with his arms around himself, shaking. Nobody has thought to put a coat on him. Andy takes his own jacket off and puts it around the boy's shoulders. A medic says something sharp about his hands. Andy does not hear it.

At three forty-one the medic on Kyle's chest stops. She looks at her partner. Her partner looks at his watch and says a time out loud.

Nobody in the yard says anything after that.

Earl gets up off his heels. It takes him two tries. He walks over to the Nine structure and stands under it. He puts his bare knuckles to the steel. He does not rap them.

He leaves them there.

The first sheriff's deputy is young, younger than Kyle was. He has a notebook and a pen that will not write in the cold. He comes to Andy because Andy is standing where the foreman stands. He asks Andy his name. Andy gives it. He asks who is in charge of the crew. Andy says he is. The deputy writes that down, or tries to. He asks Andy if he can tell him what happened.

"The line was dead," Andy says. "It was cleared dead by the control centre and tested dead by my crew at eleven forty-five. At about two fifty we moved the line-side ground set to reach the second bay. The conductor was not retested before the set was moved. A hand went on the conductor before it was grounded." He hears his own voice doing it as his father taught him and Clyde taught him. In order. Nothing added. He does not stop it. "The procedure calls for a retest. It was skipped. I saw it skipped, and I didn't stop it. I was the foreman."

The deputy looks at him. He has stopped trying to write.

“Sir, you don’t have to—“

“Write it down,” Andy says.

The deputy looks at his pen. He shakes it. He writes.

The medic who looked at Andy’s face comes back with Kyle’s phone in a clear plastic bag. It has stopped buzzing. “Is there somebody we should call? Next of kin?”

“His girlfriend,” Andy says. “They’ve got a baby. Harper. She’s five months.”

“What’s the girlfriend’s name?”

Andy opens his mouth. He knows the baby’s name. He knows the baby is too long for her bassinet. Her feet touch the end. He knows what Kyle was going to buy with the overtime. He has heard Kyle talk about the girlfriend a hundred times, *she says* and *she thinks* and *she’ll kill me*, on every tailgate for two years.

“He never said her last name,” Andy says. “He just called her by her first. I don’t—“ He stops. “It’ll be in his phone. She’s the one who’s been calling.”

The medic nods and writes something and goes.

They take Kyle away at ten to four. They put him in the first ambulance under a sheet. The ambulance goes out through the gate slowly, with no lights and no siren, and turns onto the creek road towards town. The second ambulance takes Andy, finally. Earl tells him to get in it, and Andy finds he cannot argue with Earl. He sits on the edge of the stretcher inside with the doors open. A medic puts something cold on his hands. Andy looks out at the yard.

The floodlights are still on. Nobody has thought to turn them off. They make a room out of the yard, as they have all night. Gravel and steel and frost. The Nine structure with its gaps where the sections came down. The sections lying in a row on the gravel. The grounds hanging from the arm. The sling in a heap where Earl dropped it. Earl is standing in the middle of it alone with his hands at his sides, looking up at the structure.

Clyde

At four the radio opens one last time. It is Earl Haught, whom Clyde has never spoken to, whose voice he knows from three minutes of an open key. Earl says the crew is off the structure. He says the medics have taken Kyle Yoder. He says the foreman is going in the second ambulance with burns to his face and hands. Then, in the old form, word for word, he asks to hand back the clearance on the Circuit Nine getaway at Harmon Run, because the foreman who held it cannot.

Clyde takes it back. He reads out the equipment, the limits and the tags, and Earl reads them back to him. Clyde writes the time in the box. He signs it, *C. Miller*, under the place where he signed it at eight minutes to midnight.

"Clearance returned, zero four zero two," Clyde says. "Valley Control out."

"Harmon Run out," says Earl, and the radio closes.

The relief shift comes at half past four, two and a half hours early, because somebody has called them in. First come two operators Clyde has worked beside for twenty years. After them comes the supervisor, with his coat still on and his car keys in his hand, and he does not take either off.

Nobody knows what to say to Clyde, so nobody tries. One of the relief operators puts a hand on his shoulder going past. He leaves it there a second before he takes it away. The other one sits down at Kendra's desk when Kendra gets up. He pulls the order towards him. He reads Clyde's pencil ticks down the margin without saying anything, then starts a new page.

Kendra finishes her log first. She has been writing the incident report since three-thirty, and she does not stop when the relief comes in. She stands at the corner of the desk with the keyboard and finishes it standing up. Clyde watches her add a line near the top, at the right time, between two lines she wrote before. She does not ask him about it. She does not look at him while she writes it.

Approx. 01:45 – Trainee advised operator of engine classification (induced, within margin) and recommended no action. Trainee cited cost of scrubbing window. See operator’s note.

She reads it back with her lips moving slightly. Then she saves it and logs out. She stands there with her hands at her sides.

“I’m going to stay,” she says. “Till they take my statement.”

“They’ll send you home.”

“Then I’ll go home.” She looks at the board. Nine is gray from end to end. The red line is still sitting at the top of the event list, where the relief operator has not scrolled it away. “I wrote the tests for 11.4,” she says. “We ran it in the simulator four hundred times. Nobody ever used it on a real board.” She stops. “It took you nine seconds.”

The supervisor asks Clyde to come into the office, and Clyde goes. The office is a glass box at the end of the long room. It has a desk, two chairs, and a window that looks at the same river. They do not sit in either chair.

“The regional desk has been on to me since three,” the supervisor says. “The Tier One contract people have been on to them. I’ve got a sheriff’s report coming. I’ve got the union. I’ve got the hub’s owners saying their man is sitting on the floor of their switchgear room and won’t talk to anybody.” He stops. “I’ve got Section 11.4 with a blank justification field.”

“I know.”

“Do you want to fill it in?”

Clyde takes the notebook out of his shirt pocket. He takes the rubber band off it and puts the band in his trouser pocket. Opening

the notebook to the page, he lays it on the desk, open and turned towards the supervisor, with his thumb on the line that starts 01:38.

The supervisor reads it twice. Clyde can see his eyes go down the page and back up to the top. He sees him stop at the word *out*. Then he sees him reach *Supv: carry on*, stop there, and not move for a while.

“Is this the only copy?”

“It’s the only copy of anything I’ve ever written in one of those,” Clyde says.

The supervisor puts his own hand flat beside the notebook, not on it. “I’ll have to give this to them.”

“I know. That’s why I brought it.”

“They’ll ask you why you didn’t pull the crew at one forty-five.”

“Yes.”

“What will you tell them?”

Clyde looks at the notebook on the desk between them. “What it says.”

The supervisor looks at it too. He looks at the line near the bottom of the entry, in Clyde’s small upright pencil, where it says *Supv: carry on*.

“It says that,” the supervisor says.

“It does.”

Out in the long room, the relief operator has logged into Kendra’s screen under his own name. The corner where the green number was is empty. Nobody has opened the widget. Nobody will open it tonight.

At seven the supervisor tells him to go home, and Clyde says he will. He takes his coat off the back of the chair and his thermos from under the desk. He goes down the stairs and out through the security door into the parking lot, where it is still dark and very cold, though the fog has begun to thin. He gets into his car. He does not go home.

He drives down the hill, then along the river road, then up over the ridge. At the top, where the road bends before it drops, the whole bottomland opens out below him in the thinning fog. Across it lies the hub, a long white smear of light on the flat ground by the creek, like a town that was never there before, still lit, still running. Farther down the river, past the lock and dam, the campus throws its flat glow up into the underside of the cloud, as it has every night for two years, as it did last night. He does not stop. It is getting light when he comes down the other side. The fog is lifting off the creek in long pieces. The sky over the valley is the colour of a knife. He has never driven to Harmon Run in forty-one years. He has opened and closed everything in it a thousand times from a chair on the other side of the ridge. He has read out every piece of steel in it by its number. He has never once seen it.

There is tape across the gate. One sheriff's car is parked outside it with its engine running and its lights off. A deputy sits in it drinking coffee from a thermos cup. When Clyde pulls up, the deputy gets out and comes over with his hand up.

"Sir, this is a closed scene."

"I know it is," Clyde says. He gets out of the car. "My name is Clyde Miller. I'm the system operator at Valley Control. I issued the clearance on this yard last night." He does not know how to say the next part, so he says it as it is. "I'm the one who told them the line was dead."

The deputy who looks at him is the same young deputy, with the same pen. He looks at the yard, then back at Clyde, and he does not know what to do. In the end he does nothing but let Clyde stand at the tape.

The yard is every number on the order, and Clyde has never seen it. He takes it in order. First there is the gravel, and then the fence. Then there is the transformer bank in its oil, with the plate on it whose number he knows. Then there is the row of breakers like grain bins. Then there is the Nine structure with its gaps, with a row

of pieces of it lying in the frost beside a heap of rope. Then there are the floodlights on the truck, still on, pale now against the coming day. Last, on the gravel under the structure, there is a place where the frost is gone in a wide, rough patch. The stones there are scuffed and dark. A glove lies in it. A leather work glove. Burnt through.

On the tailgate of the truck, in the frost, a hot stick lies where somebody set it down. Beside it is a tester head, its little light dark.

There is no wind this morning. Somewhere down the creek road, two miles off, the hub's diesels are still running. He cannot hear them from here.

He takes his phone out, because his hand wants something to do. The first name in his recent calls is *Andy K.*, two fifty-one, one minute forty seconds. He looks at it. Under it is the number of Andy's father, which Clyde has had for thirty years and has used perhaps a dozen times, for Christmas and for one funeral. Somebody will have to call the old man. Somebody from the company will do it properly, with a script. Clyde looks at the number. He does not call it. He puts the phone away.

"There was a young man on the crew," Clyde says. He does not know he is going to say it until he does. "I never met him. I heard his name on the radio."

The deputy waits.

"Kyle Yoder," Clyde says.

His phone rings in his coat, and he takes it out. It is the supervisor. In a careful voice he tells Clyde that the inquiry has been set for Monday at nine, at the district office. He says Clyde will be asked to attend. He says the union will send someone to sit with him. He says Clyde should go home and sleep.

Clyde says he will. He puts the phone back in his coat.

He stands at the tape. The light comes up over the ridge and reaches the yard. It finds the top of the Nine structure first, then the breakers, then the gravel, then the glove. The floodlights on the

truck go on burning in it. The deputy gets back into his car and closes the door. Clyde stands in the cold at the gate of Harmon Run with his hands in his pockets, where there is a rubber band and nothing else, and the yard does not make a sound.